

PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION PUBLICATIONS  
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS

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## THICKER THAN WATER

*Stories of Family Life*



PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION  
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS

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*Edited by* W. ROBERT WUNSCH

*and*

EDNA ALBERS

*For the*

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS



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## PREFACE

THE Commission on Human Relations has been charged with the responsibility of helping people with the urgent problems of personal and social living today. As one of its activities, the Commission is offering to students, teachers, parents, club and study groups, a series of books which deal with questions of human relations in our society.

This book, *Thicker than Water*, presents selected short stories dealing with typical problems of family members. Another Commission publication, *Literature as Exploration*,<sup>1</sup> by Louise M. Rosenblatt, explores fully and deeply the opportunities and problems involved in the use of literary materials for developing understandings in human relations. It is urgent that those teachers and leaders who are going to use *Thicker than Water* should also use this book as a guide. Dr. Rosenblatt says:

If we only do justice to the potentialities inherent in literature itself, we can make a vital social contribution. As the student vicariously shares through literature the emotions and aspirations of other human beings, he can gain heightened sensitivity to the needs and problems of others remote from him in temperament, in space, or in social environment; he can develop greater imaginative capacity to envisage the meaning of abstract laws or political and social theories for actual human lives. Such sensitivity and imagination are part of the indispensable equipment of the citizen of a democracy.

The initial plan for a series of books in human relations evolved from the conferences of the Hanover Group

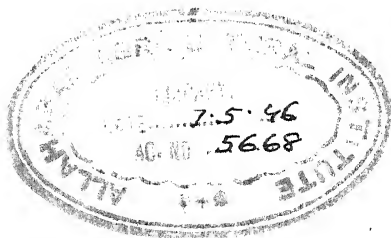
<sup>1</sup> Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, A publication of the Commission on Human Relations (New York, D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), pp. 325-326.

called together by Lawrence K. Frank. This group included Lura Beam, John Dollard, Earl T. Engle, Mary Fisher, Willis Fisher, Hugh Hartshorne, Robert Lynd, Mark A. May, Margaret Mead, and James Plant. The outlines and source materials planned by these members of the Hanover Group were given to the Commission to serve as a starting point for its activities. For their generous release of original materials and for their continuing interest and assistance in the work of the Commission, we are deeply grateful.

The Commission and the author wish to thank the publishers and authors who gave permission to quote from their publications. Specific acknowledgments will be found in the footnotes.

ALICE V. KELIHER, *Chairman*

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS book, *Thicker than Water*, is a collection of short stories selected primarily for the contribution the authors have made in illuminating some aspects of family life and family member relationships. Their use, however, should not be confined to readers who are only concerned with study of family life as such. The stories are interesting and esthetically good, and can serve many purposes. They will be read, we think, for pleasure; they will be used, like other collections of short stories, by those whose main interest is in their literary quality. Their greatest value in their present context, however, will be in supplementing technical study of family life with the kind of experience literature offers.

To contrast technical study with the study of literature is perhaps unfair. The technician who presents a systematic and organized arrangement of facts in a field of knowledge, as in sociology, biology, and systematic psychology, makes his contribution in the analyses and hypotheses he presents. But the very nature of his study often demands that he single out aspects of human behavior for an artificially separated examination. The artist, on the other hand, sees life in slices that cut through such artificial parcels, and he portrays the complexities and vagaries always present when one looks clearly at the matrix of human behavior. Though the good technician does not wish us to, we are prone to adopt his systematic presentations of behavior and expect to order behavior in systematic sequences. The mother in "The Rainy Day, the Good Mother and the Brown Suit" illustrates the difficulty we all have in applying our sys-

tematic knowledge about human behavior to the complex forms in which it appears. Here was a mother who knew all the rules, who could tell you exactly what the book said about correct parental activities. But, to deal with her own necessarily unique and different children in an effective way, she had to go beyond her unimaginative and frightened application of official prescriptions, to a more fundamental understanding of herself and of her children—all unique persons with differing needs and goals for life.

The Commission hopes that its various presentations of technical knowledge plus these authors' insight will help somewhat to bridge the gap between knowledge and behavior.<sup>1</sup> It is not too much to ask of educators, whatever their form of activity, to use every means at their disposal to increase insight, understanding, and sympathy between men.

The contribution of literature toward these ends can be great. The artist's awareness of the complexities of human personality, his understanding of human behavior, his presentation of the situations we actually find in life, can give us insight into problems that, in other contexts, remain abstract. The artist does not present artificially isolated strands of experience. He takes us with him into the very tangles of

<sup>1</sup>*The Family: Past and Present*, edited by Bernhard J. Stern for the Commission on Human Relations (New York, D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), is an invaluable source book with a combined presentation of various modes of treating information about family life. It should be used very effectively as background for the discussions of these stories. Another Commission book by Walter C. Langer on the psychology of human needs and human behavior, now in preparation, will be invaluable in the pursuit of psychological insights basic to the understanding of these characters. *Life and Growth* by Alice V. Keliher and *Do Adolescents Need Parents?* by Katherine W. Taylor, both Commission books published by D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938, should also be used in connection with the study of these stories. *Life and Growth*, written for young people, will help in the analysis of cultural pressures, and in the influence of one's own growth and development on behavior. *Do Adolescents Need Parents?* will serve as an effective combination with these stories in parent groups.



relationships, emotions, and motives with which we must deal in the solution of our daily human problems. He universalizes some of our most important interests and problems. In studying his characters we are, in essence, seeing ourselves, but without crude, painful, and perhaps harmful self-exposure. Our response is often primarily an emotional one, particularly in stories like these, where the artist has touched upon such an intimate concern as family life. Depending upon our own previous experience, interests, and desires, we identify ourselves with one or more of the characters and live vicariously the life the author depicts.

#### THE RÔLE OF THE LEADER

The artist, with his sensitivity, his perception, and his ability to communicate his thoughts and feelings to others, commands leaders who would guide others in understanding human behavior to study carefully what he has done; to know his medium, the story; and to try to be aware of the subtle meanings that lie behind his presentation. The least the artist can ask is that the leader be familiar with the stories.

Another important way in which the leader should share the writer's awareness is in recognizing the significance of the life history of the characters. Never does a human act spring from a vacuum. Much has preceded it; much will follow from it. This sensitivity to causes and probable outcomes is urgently needed in today's world—a world that seems increasingly to ignore causes and to give punishment, reprisals, hatred, and brutality precedence over understanding; a world that behaves as if today were the only significant moment in history. The leader should, therefore, use all techniques at his disposal to help build the capacity and the willingness to relate causes to outcomes.

A favorite colloquialism of young people, "How'd he

get that way?" is an excellent keynote for many a discussion. We are all too ready to pin labels on behavior, assuming that by name-calling we have really explained something. Suppose we call Libby in "Wife of the Hero" *spoiled*, or the mother in "It's an Old Story" *jealous*, or the son in "The Oratory Contest" *conceited*, or the mother in "Mother Knows Best" *possessive*. Are we in a better position to understand and to propose what could be done? No, we have simply named something without knowing why we called it that. These are only names for complexes of behavior all of which have histories; all can be studied only by an imaginative and sensitive reconstruction of the probable influences that led up to the moment of behavior depicted in the story.

The leader may ask his group to outline the probable experiences in the character's life, his probable relationships to others in his environment, the motives that have prompted his behavior, the sources of the values which are reflected in the goals he seeks. This may be done in open discussion. The leader may ask for written biographies or for short dramatic sketches portraying the earlier life of certain of the characters. This would be particularly valuable with a character like Mrs. Quail in "Mother Knows Best" because the first impulse is to assume erroneously that she is deliberately sacrificing her daughter for the satisfaction of her own desires, whereas the important thing is to find out what factors in her life made her that way, and what needs she was striving to fulfil.

The leader has equal responsibility for helping his group to predict possible outcomes from present situations. There is little positive value in understanding past causes unless we can use this knowledge to see today's causes as the background of future consequences. For only then do we alter the course of the future in the direction of a better life.

True we cannot be, and must not attempt to be in any deterministic way, seers and prophets; we cannot deny the complexity of behavior out of which the future is made. But we do know that the child, denied his brown suit by a tense mother who makes no effort to find out why he wants it, will probably show some form of irritation. We do know that the man, prevented from living what his neighbors call his "manly" rôle ("Man's Day") through the baffling economic restrictions imposed upon him, will probably be unable to accept his wife's success in the very field where he feels himself a failure.

As we can learn to predict possible future reactions by seeing their causes in the present, we can learn to improve man's relationships. To help develop this sense of the future with its roots in the present, the leader can encourage open discussion, can urge the continuation of the written biographies or the dramatic treatments into the future. In a story which deals with a moment of tension, as "The Red Hat," it might be wise to ask what is likely to happen in the next twenty-four hours as against happenings in the next few years. In a story such as "At Sundown" it would probably be more revealing to discuss possible developments in the boy's life in the following ten or twenty years.

To prevent a false note of determinism—the feeling that the future is already a formed bud in the past to unfold but not to change—it is important for the leader often to lead his group in a discussion of how the lives of the characters might change if certain basic causes were altered. This is what actually happens in our development. We change as our complex of self and environment changes; the optimistic thought is that we could control the direction of those changes far more than we now do if we made concerted effort to change some of the causes. Suppose the husband in "Man's Day" should get a job the next day; what effect on

both would that have? Or suppose, by some chance, they should be transported to a culture where the imperative for a man to support his wife is not as strong as in ours, or indeed where the wife is expected to support her husband;<sup>2</sup> what effect would that have? Suppose Elizabeth's mother in "One with Shakespeare" should realize that her daughter is gifted and begin to support her desire to write; what difference would that make? Suppose the community in "Fruit Tramp" had agreed that the transient families had to live and had found a way to pay their wages; how would that change the outcome?

All of this calls upon the leader for another dimension of awareness. He must realize the tremendous force of cultural values in the motivation of human behavior. We mentioned this in the possible explanation of the behavior of the husband in "The Red Hat." Our values inevitably are reflected in our motivations. The trouble is that we are so intimately tied up with the dominant values of our culture from the time of our infancy that it is hard to step away from them and see what they are; it is at times exceedingly difficult to change them. Why did the boy in "At Sundown" feel unclean after his sex experience, even though it was with a girl he dearly loved and deeply respected? Had he lived in Samoa he would not have felt so. Why did the teacher and principal in "Five Ripe Pears" consider the pears "evidence" of "stealing"? Had the pears been wild blackberries growing in an unclaimed field the teacher and principal would not have said they were stolen. Why did the story "Black on White" turn out as it did? Would the ending have been different in England? Why was the

<sup>2</sup> For studies of different cultures and the rôles the family members play *The Family: Past and Present* is quite valuable. For young people, *Life and Growth*, especially the chapter "When in Rome," has helpful material on the ways we get our values and how they may cause conflict in our lives.

mother in "One with Shakespeare" so concerned about her daughter's school marks; the family in "The Oratory Contest" about the oratory prize; the mother in "The Rainy Day" about being a "perfect" mother? Do not all of these forms of behavior bear an important relation to the things we in America are used to valuing and the things we attempt to discredit?

And this leads to the most delicate and probably the most disputed task of the leader, that of helping his group bring into focus the values by which they live—by which they inevitably judge the behavior of others. This kind of study can lead the group to be critical of the values under which its members are now operating. It is necessary for the leader, however, to guard against hurtful self-revelations or forms of verbal exhibitionism. He must be sensitive to these, and he should be able to divert them from open discussion to intimate care by experts. He can help them to see where present values could yield to more humane and workable ones. They may find that their judgments have been based on oversimplified or perhaps erroneous beliefs, possibly upon deep-seated prejudices, or that they have been in the habit of looking at behavior in narrowly moralistic settings. Therefore, the leader may find it necessary to help the group to analyze why they responded as they did to certain characters and situations; what their response implies in terms of values, in terms of an honest search for causes; what it means for other relationships in life where similar situations might occur.

The possible gains from using literature in this way are many. The literary experience helps us develop the kind of imagination most needed in our intimate human relations. It dramatizes for us the meaning of cultural pressures in shaping behavior. At the same time, it shows us the diversity

and complexity of human behavior in our own heterogeneous society and in other cultures. Literature broadens our conception of humanly possible ways to think and act and feel; we live with our imaginations through numerous patterns of relationship, many of them quite different from our accustomed ways. Especially in youth we are disturbed about our normality, and we measure it largely in terms of the narrow range of behavior we think acceptable. Literature can provide release and reassurance here. It may, as well, help us to see ourselves more objectively as we identify with characters and analyze the roots and the outcomes of their behavior. Best of all, literature increases our ability to understand the needs and problems of other people, and we may begin, thus, to realize that for each of us life is a two-way relationship; as people, forces, and things change us, we in turn become the agents of change for others. The joy of it is that we are on the threshold of knowing enough to make those changes come out for the better.

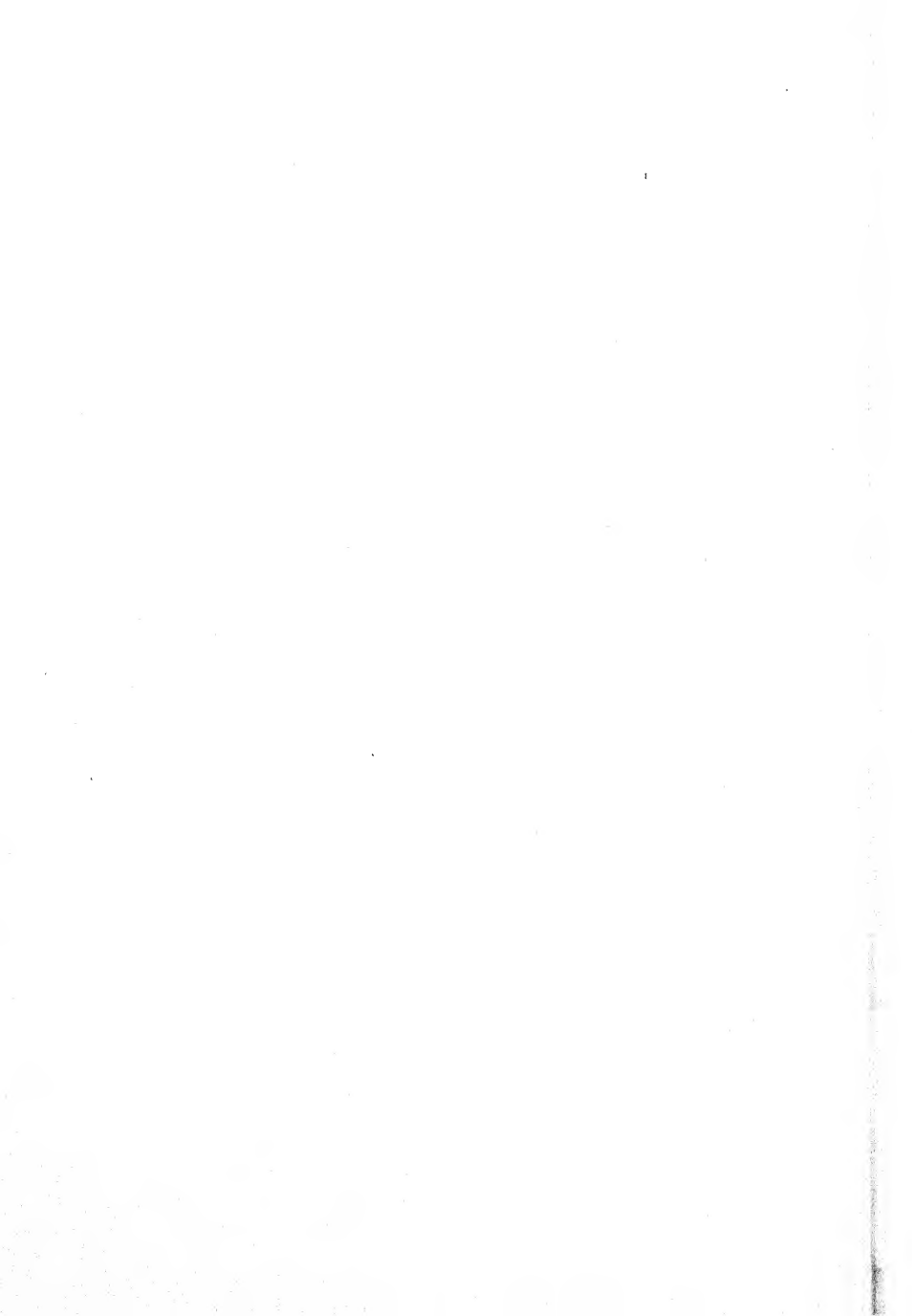
A.V.K.

E.A.

W.R.W.

THICKER THAN WATER

*Stories of Family Life*





## ONE WITH SHAKESPEARE<sup>1</sup>

BY MARTHA FOLEY

*"Mother, Miss Cox says I have a spark of divine fire. I am to be a great writer some day."  
"Isn't that nice? Did you remember not to wipe your pen point on your petticoat today?"*

YES, Miss Cox was there, sitting at her desk in the almost empty classroom. Elizabeth took in the theme she had written to make up for a class missed because of illness.

A description of people under changing circumstances was the assignment.

Elizabeth had chosen immigrants arriving at a Boston dock. She had got quite excited as she wrote about the black-eyed women and their red and blue dresses, the swarthy men and their earrings, and the brightness of a faraway Mediterranean land slipping off a rocking boat to be lost in the grayness of Boston streets.

Elizabeth had liked writing this theme better than anything she had done since the description of a sunset. Amethyst and rose with a silver ribbon of river. Elizabeth shivered. A silver ribbon—that was lovely. And so was scarlet kerchief in the night of her hair in this theme. Words were so beautiful.

Miss Cox read the new theme, a red pencil poised in her authoritative fingers. Miss Cox was so strong. She was

<sup>1</sup> From *A Story Anthology, 1931-1933* by Whit Burnett and Martha Foley (New York, The Vanguard Press, 1933). Reprinted by permission of the author.

strongest of all the teachers in the school. Stronger even than the two men teachers, Mr. Carpenter of physics and Mr. Cattell of math. A beautiful strongness. Thought of Miss Cox made Elizabeth feel as she did when two bright shiny words suddenly sprang together to make a beautiful, perfect phrase.

Elizabeth was glad she had Miss Cox as an English teacher and not Miss Foster anymore. Miss Foster had made the class last year count the number of times certain words occurred in *Poor Richard's Almanac* to be sure they read the book right through word for word. And the words were all so ugly. Like the pictures of Benjamin Franklin. But Miss Cox made you feel the words. As when she read from *A Tale of Two Cities* in her deep singing voice, this is a better thing than I have ever done. Poor Sydney Carton.

Miss Cox had finished the second page of the theme. She was looking up at Elizabeth, her small dark blue eyes lighting up her glasses.

"Let me give you a pointer, my dear."

Elizabeth automatically looked toward the blackboard ledge at the chalky pointer until the words my dear bit into her mind. My dear! Miss Cox had called her my dear.

"You have a spark of the divine fire," Miss Cox said. "You should make writing your vocation."

Elizabeth flamed. Miss Cox, my dear, themes about immigrants, blackboards and desks whirled and fused in the divine fire.

Miss Cox marked A in the red pencil at the top of the theme and Elizabeth said thank you and went away.

Elizabeth went back to her desk in the 3 A classroom which was in charge of Miss Perry. Miss Perry was her Greek teacher as well as her room teacher. Somehow Miss Perry made Elizabeth hate Greek. Elizabeth liked to think of Greece. White and gold in a blue Aegean. I, Sappho. Wail-

ing Trojan women. Aristotle and Plato and Socrates. Grace and brain, said her father of the men. But that was outside the Greek class. To Miss Perry Greece was the aorist of tithemi and Xenophon's march in the Anabasis. I hate Miss Perry, the aorist and Xenophon. Oh, how I hate them.

But this morning Elizabeth only pitied Miss Perry. She had no spark of the divine fire, poor thing.

Greek was the first class in the morning. Elizabeth didn't care. She should make writing her vocation. That was something Miss Perry could never do. If she were called on for the list of irregular verbs this morning she would like to tell Miss Perry that. It would explain why she hadn't studied her Greek home lesson. Why should she be bothered with conjugations when she had to describe blue and red men arriving on an alien shore?

"Now, Miss Morris, will you please give me the principal parts of the verb to give."

That was didami. But what was the perfect tense? Divine fire, divine fire.

"If you don't know, you may sit down. But I warn you that unless you do your home lessons better you are not going to pass this month."

Divine fire, divine fire.

The second hour was study class. Under Miss Pratt with the ugly bulb of a nose, splotchy face and eternal smile. Miss Pratt taught something or another to the younger girls down in the sixth class. She always smiled at Elizabeth but Elizabeth seldom smiled back. Her smile never means anything, thought Elizabeth.

Elizabeth dumped her books down on her desk in Miss Pratt's room. She opened Vergil to the part she liked. Where Aeneas told Dido the story of his wandering while the stars waned and drooped in the sky. It was not her lesson. She had had that months ago. But she liked going

back over it just as she liked the beginning of the first book. Great bearded Aeneas rang out in *arma virumque cano*. That was strong. She would write strong some day. Strong like Vergil and fine like Swinburne. I will go back to the great sweet mother, mother and lover of men, the sea.

Swinburne had divine fire. Keats. Shelley, hail to thee, blithe spirit. And Masfield whose autograph she had bought for five shillings, not to help the British but to have a bit of the man who wrote *The Widow in the Bye Street*.

Elizabeth looked out into the school courtyard. Fine green shoots. Yellow on the laburnum. Spring was here. Divine fire, divine fire.

"Miss Morris, haven't you any work to do?"

Miss Pratt smiling. Nasty, nasty smiling. Didn't know whom she was talking to like that? A great writer. A girl who would be famous. Let her ask Miss Cox. Why, I have a spark of the divine fire. I am one with Shakespeare and Keats, Thackeray and Brontë and all the other great writers.

Elizabeth plumped her head in her hands and stared at the Latin page. Opposite was an illustration of an old statue, supposed to be Dido. Further on was a pen-and-ink sketch of Dido mounting the funeral pyre. Further on was a sketch of Aeneas nearing Rome. Further on was the vocabulary. Then the end of the book. Elizabeth turned, page by page. She could not study and if she looked out the window at Spring again Miss Pratt would be nasty.

"Please, Miss Pratt, may I go to the library?"

"Must you go to the library? What for?"

"I have a reference in my history lesson to look up in the encyclopaedia."

"Very well."

The library was large and quiet. A whole floor above Miss Pratt and the study class. It was divided off into alcoves. History in one. Encyclopaedias in another. Languages,

sciences. Fiction and poetry were in the farthest end which opened out toward the Fenway. The Fenway with its river and wide sky where Elizabeth liked to walk alone.

Elizabeth had read all the fiction and all the poetry. All of Jane Austen and the Sorrows of Werther and lots of other books which had nothing to do with her classes. She was always afraid one of her teachers would come in some day during study class and ask her what she was reading that book for. But that had never happened. And the librarian never paid any attention to her.

Now she went into the fiction and poetry alcove and sat on a small shelf ladder. She looked out the window at the long line of poplars rimming the fens. What would she call them if she were writing about them? Black sentinels against the sky. Oh, beautiful, oh, beautiful. That was the divine fire.

There was ancient history with Miss Tudor who had had the smallpox and it showed all over her face, and geometry with Mr. Cattell who had a gray beard and gray eyes and gray clothes and gray manner. Elizabeth liked that, gray manner. That was what the Advanced English Composition called penetrating analysis of character. She would do lots of penetrating analysis when she wrote in earnest.

She would write novels, the greatest, most moving novels ever written, like *Jean Christophe*, Elizabeth was deciding when the bell rang for the end of the history lesson. And in between the novels she would write fine medallions of short stories like Tchekov's, Elizabeth told herself when the bell rang for the end of the geometry lesson. And she would always write lovely poems in between the novels and the short stories, she was thinking when the bell rang for the end of the school day.

Elizabeth walked past Miss Cox's room on her way out of the building. She slowed down her steps as she came to the

door. Miss Cox was putting away her things in the drawer of her desk. Elizabeth would dedicate her first book to Miss Cox. To Miss Eleanor G. Cox this book is gratefully dedicated by the author.

Eileen and Ruth were waiting for Elizabeth at the entrance. Eileen was the cousin of a famous poet and her mother was an Anarchist. Elizabeth liked the thought of anyone being an Anarchist. It sounded so much more beautiful than being a Democrat or a Republican. And Ruth, who was a class ahead, had already had her poems printed in the *Transcript*. Four times. And one of the poems had been reprinted by William Stanley Braithwaite in his anthology. Oh, they were going to be great and famous, all three.

"Let's walk home and save our fares for fudge sundaes," said Eileen.

"All right, only I am going to have pineapple," said Ruth.

"I'll go with you but I won't have any sundae," Elizabeth said. "I'm going to save my fares this week to buy Miss Cox flowers."

"You have a crush on Miss Cox."

"Perhaps I have and perhaps I haven't. Anyway, she said something wonderful to me this morning. She said I had a spark of the divine fire and should make writing my vocation."

"Oh, that is wonderful. She never told me that, not even after Mr. Braithwaite took one of my poems for his anthology."

"This is the happiest day of my life. Even when I have written many books and proved Miss Cox's faith in me, I shall always look back to this day. I never expected to be so wonderfully happy."

The three girls, arm in arm, walked through the Fenway.

"I tell you, let's not get sundaes. Since Elizabeth's saving her money, it isn't fair to go and eat them right before her. Let's you, Ruth, and I buy some of those big frosted doughnuts and some bananas and eat them on the Charles River esplanade. Then Elizabeth can have some too."

"All right, and we can watch the sun set."

"Oh, but that's what isn't fair. I to save my money and then eat up what you buy."

"Next time you can give us something."

Elizabeth loved the Charles River. It always hurt her to think that it was on a Charles River bridge that Longfellow should have made up I stood on the bridge at midnight. Perhaps that wasn't so bad but so many parodies of the poem had ridiculed the river. Once Elizabeth had written a "Letter to a River." Elizabeth pretended she was away off somewhere, like in New York, and was writing to the river to tell how much she missed its beauty. She had put so many lovely phrases in it, she thought, and she couldn't understand why the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* had sent it back to her. But great writers always had many rejections first. That Scottish writer in whose eyes Ruth said she saw his soul, had said in his lecture that to write greatly, one must first suffer greatly.

How she had suffered, thought Elizabeth. Her math and Greek teachers were so cruel to her. She who had a spark of divine fire to be treated as they treated her. Tears came to her eyes. And now, when she was tired, she was walking home instead of riding so she could buy Miss Cox flowers. Pink sweetheart roses. Little tight knots of flowers. That was suffering and sacrifice. But it was for love as well as for literature.

"I felt the rhythm of the universe last night," Ruth was saying. "I was sitting on the roof in the dark and I felt the night all around me."

"That makes me think of swiftly walk over the western wave, spirit of night. But it always bothers me that the wave is to the east in Boston," said Eileen. "Otherwise I like that poem very much."

"The rhythm of the universe? What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know. The way someone said the stars swing round in their courses. And that's why I never, never want to study astronomy. I want only to imagine the stars. That's so much more beautiful than any facts about them can ever be."

"I don't agree with you at all. Why, when you think that the light of the nearest star started coming to you three years ago and what you were doing then and how this minute some star is starting to send you light that may not get to you until you're far away and old and . . ."

"Stop! Don't give me facts about the stars! You can have those facts about your stars, if you want. But leave me my stars to love as I please."

"Oh, very well. There, now the sky is coloring. See that lovely clear green high up. Pretty soon the deep color will come. My, these frosted doughnuts are good. Much better than any near where we live."

"There's the first light on the other bank. Over near the Tech building."

That was what it was to have a spark of divine fire, Elizabeth's thoughts flowed on with the darkening river. She could put all this, the river and the sky colors and the lights into writing. People would feel the loveliness of the world as they had never felt it before. People would no longer walk with their heads bent to the street when there was a sunset to be seen. What have you done to her, masters of men, that her head should be bowed down thus, thus in the deepening twilight and golden angelus? Her father said Noyes wrote maudlin singsong. It was jingly sometimes but



she did like it. And too many heads were bowed down, you masters of men.

"Mother'll scold me if I stay any later," said Eileen.

"And my mother said she wouldn't get me a new dress for the class party if I came home late again."

"Yes, we must all be going. But isn't it nice to think when you wake up at home in bed at night that the river is out here, creeping on and on under the stars?"

"No wonder Miss Cox said you had divine fire. Let's put our banana peels in here. This is Spring Clean-Up Week, you know."

"Good night."

"Good night."

"Good night."

Holding the thought of her own greatness close to her, Elizabeth went home. A silver moon curled in the sky. That is the moon Shelley, Shakespeare, Spencer and yes, way back, Chaucer looked at. And now I am looking at it.

"Mother, Miss Cox says I have a spark of divine fire. I am to be a great writer some day."

"Isn't that nice? Did you remember not to wipe your pen point on your petticoat today?"

"Oh, mother, you know that's not a question of remembering. I never do it when I'm thinking about it. But you didn't half listen to what Miss Cox said about me."

"Indeed I did. She said you had a divine spark of fire. That means you'll get another A in English this month on your report card."

"It means more than any old report card. It means my whole life. I'm to be a writer, a great writer."

"But first you must finish school and college. And that means you have to do your mathematics better. Remember how angry your father was about that E in geometry last month."

Elizabeth sighed. She went out on the back porch which looked across the city. Lights pricked the blackness. Like a necklace which had spilled over velvet. Oh, words were lovely.

The moon was still there, a more emphatic silver now. Moon of Shelley and Keats and Shakespeare and my moon said Elizabeth and went into dinner.



## MOTHER KNOWS BEST <sup>1</sup>

BY EDNA FERBER

*If ever a girl owed everything to her mother that girl was Sally Quail. She said so, frequently. So did Ma Quail. For twenty years she managed Sally's affairs, waited on her hand and foot. Due to her expert management Sally died rich and famous and unhappy.*

THEY say there never was such a funeral in the history of New York's theatrical life. Belasco was there, and of course Dan Frohman; and though it was an eleven o'clock funeral, even two of the Barrymores got up in time to arrive at the undertaker's chapel just before the casket was carried out. The list of honorary pallbearers sounded like the cast of an all-star benefit at the Century. And as for the flowers! A drop curtain of white orchids; a blanket of lilies-of-the-valley; a pillow of creamy camellias; sheaves of roses; banks of violets. Why, the flowers alone, translated into money, would have supported the Actors' Home for years. Everything was on a similar scale. Satin where others have silk; silver where others have brass; twelve where ordinarily there are six. And her mother, Mrs. Quail ("Ma Quail"—and the term was not one of affection), swathed in expensive mourning which transformed her into a sable pillar of woe through whose transparencies you somehow got the impression that she was automatically counting the house.

<sup>1</sup> From *Mother Knows Best* by Edna Ferber (New York, Doubleday, Page and Co., 1927). Reprinted by permission of the author.

In the midst of it all lay Sally Quail, in white chiffon that was a replica of the full floating white chiffon dancing dress that she always wore at the close of her act. A consistent enough costume now. Sally was smiling a little; and all those telltale lines that she had fought during the past ten years—the tiny lines that, between thirty and forty, etch themselves about a woman's eyes and mouth and forehead—were wiped out magically, completely. What ten years of expert and indefatigable massage had never been able to do, the Mysterious Hand had accomplished in a single gesture. You almost expected her to say, in that thrillingly husky voice of hers, and with the girlish simper that she had adopted when she went on the professional stage at fourteen and still had used—not so happily—at forty:

"I will now try to give you an imitation of Miss Sally Quail at twenty. Miss . . . Sally . . . Quail . . . at . . . twenty." And it had then turned out to be an uncanny piece of mimicry, embodying not only facial similarity but something of the soul and spirit as well. Though in this particular imitation, according to the Scriptures, soul and spirit were supposed to have fled.

Crushed though she was by her sorrow, it had been Ma Quail who had seen to it that this, her talented daughter's last public appearance, should be, in every detail, as flawless as all her public appearances had been. A born impresario, Ma Quail. During the three days preceding the funeral she had insisted that they come to her for sanction in every arrangement, from motor cars to minister. And she supervised the seating arrangements like a producer on a first night.

"Sally'd have wanted me to," she explained. "She always said Mother knows best."

Of course a lot of people know that Sally Quail's real name was Louisa Schlagel. Not that it matters. Even a name

like that couldn't have stopped her climb toward fame. The Schlagels, mother and daughter, had come from Neenah, Wisconsin, propelled rapidly by Mrs. Schlagel. Between Neenah, Wisconsin, and Chicago, Illinois, they had become Mrs. Quail and Sally Quail, respectively. Mrs. Schlagel had read Hall Caine's *The Christian*. Both book and play of that name were enormously in vogue at the time. She had thought the heroine's name a romantic and lovely-sounding thing and had, perhaps almost unconsciously, appropriated its cadences for use in her daughter's stage career. "Glory Quayle . . . Glory Quayle . . . Sally . . . Sally Quayle . . . Sally Quail. . . . that's it! Sally Quail. That's short and easy to remember. And you don't run into anybody else with a name like that."

There's no doubt that if it hadn't been for this tireless general and terrible tyrant, her mother, Sally Quail would have remained Louisa Schlagel, of Neenah, Wisconsin, to the end of her days. Though her natural gifts had evidenced themselves even in her very early childhood, it had been her mother—that driving and relentless force—who had lifted her to fame and fortune. That force of Ma Quail's, in terms of power units—amperes, kilowatts, pounds—would have been sufficient to light a town, run a factory, move an engine. The girl had had plenty of spirit, too, at first. But it had been as nothing compared to the woman's iron quality. If ever a girl owed everything to her mother, that girl was Sally Quail. She said so, frequently. So did Ma Quail.

Sally was forty when she died of typhoid after an illness of but a few days. You were a little startled to learn this. Somehow, you had never thought of her as a mature woman, perhaps because she had never married, perhaps because of her mother's unceasing chaperonage. All her life she was duennaed like a Spanish infanta. Through her mother's

tireless efforts Sally Quail had had everything in the world—except two things.

In announcing her death the newspaper headlines called her Our Sally. The news was cabled all over the world, and was, certainly, as important in London and Paris as in New York and Chicago and San Francisco. Hers had been international fame. Hundreds of thousands of people were conscious of a little pang born of shock and regret when they said, over the morning paper at breakfast:

"I see where Sally Quail's dead. Gosh, that's too bad! She was just a kid. First time I saw her was in—let's see—no, she couldn't have been so young, at that. Must have been darned near forty. But an artist, all right. They say she got five thousand a week every time she stepped into vaudeville. . . . Say, look here, this coffee's stone cold again. Why is it you can't get a hot cup of coffee in this house!"

When Ma Quail was Mrs. Schlagel she had been the wife of Henry Schlagel, than whom there was nothing in Neenah less important. He was a small druggist of the kind who doesn't install a soda fountain in his drug store. Even Mrs. Schlagel couldn't make a success of her husband Henry, though she had early turned the full battery of her forces upon him; had tried to bully, bribe, cajole, threaten, nag, scold, and weep him into it. She was a fiercely ambitious woman, but there was no molding Henry. He was fluid, spineless. When you tried to shape him he ran through your fingers. Henry came of better stock than she. Mrs. Schlagel had sprung from a rather common lot living the other side of the tracks. Her marriage with the meek and dusty little apothecary had been, technically, something of a social triumph for the girl. Her father had been a day laborer, her mother a slattern. The girl, lively, high-spirited, good-looking in a bold dark sort of way, decided to lift herself out of this and did it in ten visits to the fusty little drug

store on fictitious errands. The little pharmacist, mixing drugs and grinding powders between mortar and pestle, knew nothing of the mysteries of human chemistry. His marriage was as much a surprise to him as it was to the rest of the town.

The girl Louisa was born fully six years after their marriage. By the time she was six years old the mothers of the neighborhood knew just where to find their offspring any summer evening after supper. They were certain to be gathered under the corner arc light with the June bugs blundering and bumping blindly all about and crackling under foot, while Louisa Schlagel recited "Little Orphant Annie" and sang "Jolly Old St. Nicholas" (with gestures) and gave imitations of the crowd's respective papas and mamas with uncanny fidelity. Stern parental voices, summoning children to bed, died away unheard on the soft summer air. Or, if heard:

"Willie! Clara! Come on now!"

No answer.

"Will Meyers, dòn't you let me call you again!"

"Well, Pete's sake, wait a minute, can't you. She's in the middle of it."

Sometimes an irate parent would come marching down to the corner bent on violence, only to be held in thrall.

It was absurd, because she was a plain child, thin, big-eyed, sallow. By the time she was twelve she was speaking pieces at the Elks Club Ladies' Evening and singing and giving imitations at Church sociables and K.P. suppers. The little druggist objected to this, prompted by something fine and reticent within him. But his wife was tasting the first fruits of triumphs. She had someone to manage, someone to control, someone on whom to turn the currents of her enormous directing energy. By the time Louisa was thirteen her mother was demanding five dollars a perform-

ance for her services, and getting it, which was in its way as much of a triumph in that day and place as was the five-thousand-a-week contract which she consummated in later years. At thirteen the girl was a long-legged gangling creature, all eyes and arms and elbows and (luckily) soft brown curls. She had no singing voice, really, but the vocal organ possessed a certain husky tonal quality that had in it something of power, something of tragedy, much of flexibility. And when she smiled there was something most engaging about her. A frank, boyish sort of grin that took you into her confidence: that said, "Aren't we having a grand time!"

It is difficult to say how her mother recognized the gold mine in her. She induced the manager of the little local vaudeville theatre to let Louisa go on one Monday night in an act made up of two songs and three imitations and one dance that was pretty terrible. It was before the day of the ubiquitous motion picture. The Bijou presented vaudeville of the comic tramp and the Family Four variety. Sandwiched in between these there appeared this tall gawky girl with terrifically long legs and a queer husky voice and large soft brown eyes staring out from a too-thin face. The traveling men in the audience, hardened by the cruelties of Amateur Nights in vaudeville, began to laugh. But the girl finished her opening song and went into her imitations. She imitated Mansfield, Mabel Hite, and Rose Coghlan, all of whom her mother had taken her to see at the Appleton Wisconsin Opera House just twenty-five minutes distant by interurban street car. The one-night stand was flourishing then, and the stars of the theatre were not so lofty that they would refuse to twinkle west of Chicago. Well, even the traveling men saw that here was a weird and unusual gift. Something in the sight of this awkward white-faced child transforming herself miraculously before their eyes into the tragic mask of the buxom Coghlan, or



the impish grotesqueries of the clownish Hite or the impressive person of Mansfield moved the beholder to a sort of tearful laughter. Still, it cannot truthfully be said that there was anything spectacular about this, her first appearance on a professional stage. The opinion was that, while the kid was clever, she ought to be home in bed.

That trial served to crystallize into determination the half-formed plan in Mrs. Schlagel's mind. She took the child to Chicago, lied about her age, haunted such booking offices as that city afforded, hounded the vaudeville managers, fought the Gerry society, got a hearing, wrote her husband that she was not coming back—and the career of Sally Quail was started.

To the day she died there always was something virginal and untouched looking about Sally Quail. It was part of her charm. At twenty she looked seventeen. At twenty-nine she looked twenty. At thirty she looked twenty-five. At thirty-five she looked thirty—under that new overhead amber lighting. And then, at thirty-nine, suddenly, she looked thirty-nine. Though she was massaged and manicured and brushed and creamed and exercised and packed in cotton wool she took on, in some mysterious way, the appearance of the woman of whom we say that she is well preserved.

For twenty-five years—from fifteen to forty—nothing could prevent Sally's progress, for the way was cleared for her by her mother. That remarkable woman pushed on as relentlessly, as irresistibly as a glacier, sweeping before her every obstruction that stood in her path. Here was this girl who could sing a little, though she had no voice; dance a little, though she had too long legs; act a little, though her dramatic gift was slight; mimic marvelously. No one ever made more out of little than did Ma Quail. She fought for contracts. She fought for plays. She fought for a better spot always in vaudeville, and even from the first Sally never

closed the show. It was years before Sally became a real headliner in vaudeville, with the star's dressing room and her name in electric lights over the entrance. But her mother surrounded her with all the care, the glamour, the ceremony of stardom. She was tireless, indomitable, inescapable. Press agents featured Sally just to escape her mother. Office boys wilted at her approach. Managers and producers received her with a kind of grim and bitter admiration; recognizing this iron woman as one against whom their weapons were powerless.

"Now, look here, Mrs. Quail," they would say, in desperation, "you don't expect me to go to work and star a girl that hasn't got the stuff for it." Then, in anticipation of what was coming, from the look in Ma Quail's face, "Now, wait a minute! *Wait* a min-ute! I don't say she won't, after a while. Give her time. She's only a kid. Wait till she has a little experience. She'll grow. Prob'ly be a great artist some day. She's a great little kid, that kid of yours. Only—"

Though it was, perhaps, old Kiper himself speaking, here he floundered, hesitated, stopped. Ma Quail's steely glance ran him through. "Only what?"

A heartening champ at his unlighted cigar. "Well—uh—how old is Sally now? Between us, you know. I mean—how old is the kid?"

"Nineteen."

"Hm. Twenty-one, huh. Ever been in love?"

Ma Quail bridled. "Sally has always had a great deal of attention, and the boys all—"

"Ye-e-e-s, I know. I know. Has she ever been in love?"

Mrs. Quail pursed up her lips, bridled, tossed her head. "Sally is as unspoiled as a child, and as pure as one, too. She's never even been kissed. She—"

Ben Kiper brought one fat fist down on the mahogany of his office desk. "Yeh, and why! No fellah's going to kiss

a girl when her mother's holding her hand. Now, wait a minute. Don't get huffy. I'm telling you something for your own good, and nobody knows better than Ben Kiper that when he does that he loses a friend every time. But I'm going to tell you, just the same. You've been a wonderful mother to that kid, but if you're smart you'll let her alone now. Let her paddle her own canoe a little. Give her a chance. What if she does run on the rocks a little, and bump her nose and stub her toe—" He was getting mixed in his metaphor, but his sincerity was undeniable.

"You're crazy," said Ma Quail. "Sally can't get along without me. She's said so a million times, and it's true. She can't get dressed without me, or make up. She can't go on unless I'm standing in the first entrance. She'd be lost without me."

"Yeh. Well." He made a little gesture of finality, of defeat. "All right, Ma. You win. Only, when she leaves you, don't come around and say I didn't warn you."

Ma Quail stood up, her diamond ear-drops flashing with the vigor of her movements. She had started to buy diamonds in Sally's second year of stage success. At first they were rather smoky little diamonds of the kind that cluster around a turquoise for support. But as the years went on you could mark the degree of Sally's progress by the increasing whiteness, brilliance, and size of Ma Quail's gems. She bought them, she said, as an investment. At this moment they were only fair in size, refractive power, and color. But they took on life from the very energy of their wearer.

"And let me tell you this, Mr. Kiper. When the day comes that you'll offer my Sally twenty-five hundred a week, and she'll turn it down—"

"You'll turn it down, you mean," interrupted Kiper.

"All right. I'll turn it down. But just remember the time when you refused to star her for five hundred a week. You

can tell the story on yourself if you want to. You're probably just fool enough."

Which is no way for a stage mama to talk to a powerful and notoriously kind-hearted old theatrical manager. But as it turned out, he was wrong and she was right, in the matter of predictions.

Ben Kiper, seeing that he had hit home, decided he might as well let Ma Quail have both barrels and make an enemy for life. He was interested in Sally's career and fond of the girl. And he was a wise old gargoye. Ma Quail was fastening her furs, an angry eye on the door. Kiper fixed upon her a look at once patriarchal and satyric—in itself no mean histrionic feat.

"Now, listen, Ma. You know's well as I do that no girl can make a hit in musical comedy unless she's got sex appeal. And how's anybody going to find out whether Sally's got it or not until you cut loose those apron strings you've got her all tied up with? My God—a stage nun! That's what she is. Let her fall in love and break her heart, and pick up the pieces, and marry, and have a terrible time, maybe; and fight, and make up, and get—"

Ma Quail was at the door. She looked every inch the stage mother. Suddenly her face was darkly stamped and twisted with jealousy and fear. "Sally doesn't want to marry. Sally doesn't want to marry. She's told me so."

"Yeh?" The old eyes, with the oyster pouches beneath, narrowed as they regarded her. Freud and fixations were not cant words at that time; and certainly old Ben Kiper foresaw nothing of the latter-day psychology. But he knew many of the tortuous paths that twist the human mind; and here he recognized something familiar and ugly. "Yeh? Who put that funny idea in her head? Give her a chance, why don't you?"

"If my Sally ever marries it'll be a prince."

"Prince! Hell! Not if she picks him," yelled old Kiper, just before she slammed the door behind her.

You would have thought that blunt talk like this might have opened her eyes, but such scenes only served to increase Ma Quail's watchfulness, her devotion, her tireless planning.

Sometimes headliners (feminine) used to resent the pomp and ceremony with which Ma Quail would surround this young person who was only filling third spot on the vaudeville bill. A change of costume in the wings. A velvet curtain hung there for protection. A square of white sheeting on the floor before the emergency dressing table so that the hem of her gown should not be sullied; a wicker clothes basket, chastely covered with snowy white, holding her quick change—gown, slippers, make-up. A special pan of special resin in which to rub the soles of her satin slippers before she went into her dance.

"Listen! Who's headliner on this bill—me or Quail?" they would demand of the house manager.

Mother and daughter went to the theatre together. Ma Quail stood in the wings throughout the time that Sally was on stage; dressed her; undressed her; made her up; criticized her; took her home. Put her to bed. She brought her her breakfast in the morning. They ate their early dinner together; their bite of late supper. Sally was an amiable and generous girl, and devoted to her mother. But there were times when she was unaccountably irritable, restless, impatient. Ma Quail put this down to temperament and was rather pleased than otherwise.

Sally's big chance in musical comedy (*Miss Me* ran two solid years in New York) did not come until she was twenty-four. Before she was starred in that success she had won solid recognition in vaudeville, and in musical comedy rôles that were not stellar. And always, just ahead of her,

her mother, inserting a wedge here, getting a toe in there, widening the opening that led to stardom.

It was when Sally was playing the old Olympic Theatre in Chicago that Ma Quail fell ill and was forced to take to her bed. It was influenza, of which there was a particularly violent epidemic at the time. It was elegantly termed "la grippe"; or, as Mrs. Quail explained, "a touch of the la grippe." She literally had never been ill, and thought that, by treating this illness with contempt, she could vanquish it. For one afternoon and one evening performance she stuck it out, appearing sunken-eyed and putty-faced at the theatre, there to stand alternately shivering and burning in the wings until finally they forced her to go back to her hotel (they were stopping at the old Sherman House) and to bed, where she just escaped pneumonia. They got a nurse, though Ma Quail fought this.

Sick as she was, and even a bit delirious the first twenty-four hours, she still ruled Sally from her bed. Sally was playing down on the bill, which meant a good spot toward the end of the programme in the second half. Ma Quail fumed until Sally was off to the theatre; tossed and turned and muttered during her absence; began to listen for her return a full hour before the girl could possibly have finished her act. She thrashed about on her pillows, sat up, threatened to get out of bed, quarreled chronically with her long-suffering nurse, was as impatient and difficult as a sick man.

"Now she's putting on her make-up. She never gets it on right unless I'm there. Chunks her grease paint. . . . Now she's dressing. There was a hook that was working a little loose on her white. It may be off by now, for all I know. I should have caught it when I noticed it, but I thought I'd do it next. . . . Now it's almost time to go on. That Nixon is just ahead of her. I told them not to run those two acts

next to each other. Not that that cheap hoofer's act is anything like my Sally's. But she ought to follow a sketch. If I was up I'd make them shift the bill. . . . Now she's on. . . ." She would hum a little tune, her eyes bright and heavy with fever, a dull glow in her sallow cheeks, her hair twisted into a careless knot on top of her aching head. . . . "That's right. That's right. Go on. . . . Now she's off. There's her bow music. She's taking her curtains. One . . . two . . . three . . . four—she could have had another if they'd taken the curtain up again. . . . She'll be home now in half an hour . . . twenty minutes . . . fifteen . . . ten. . . . What time is it, Miss Burke?"

The long-suffering Miss Burke would tell her the truth, having tried a professionally soothing lie on her first day with Ma Quail, and having been caught in it, with effects not calculated to allay fever in a case of la grippe.

"Now, Mrs. Quail, you mustn't get yourself all worked up this way. Just see if you can't drop off a minute before Miss Sally gets back. She'll be here before you know it, and then won't you be surprised!"

"Talk like a fool," retorted Ma Quail. "What's keeping her, I wonder."

On the first day of her mother's illness Sally tore off her clothes, only half removed her make-up, flew back to the hotel, sat by her mother's bedside against the nurse's warnings and the half-hearted protests of her mother. The second matinée she returned to the hotel directly after her performance, but her haste was, perhaps, a shade less feverish than it had been the night before. On the third night, after she had finished dressing, she came out to the first entrance and stood there to watch Nixon doing his act. Nixon was the hoofer of whom her mother had spoken with contempt. His act preceded hers. Ma Quail never permitted Sally to stand in the entrance watching the other acts. "Keeping

tabs," it was called; or catching the act; and Sally loved to do it, particularly when the act was a dancing act. She loved dancing, especially clog and soft shoe. At both of these Nixon seemed to be expert. Curiously enough, she found three pairs of eyes squinting through the tiny gap in the old red plush curtain that hung before the first entrance. High praise, certainly, for Nixon. Three—and now, with Sally, four—fellow actors on the bill keeping tabs on his act meant that Nixon's act was worth watching.

"New stuff?" whispered Sally to the nearest ear.

"Every time he goes on. Wait a minute. There now. Get that one. He didn't pull that one this afternoon. He makes every other hooper I ever saw look like they was nailed to the floor."

Sally, standing in the entrance, applied a fascinated eye to an inch of slit in the curtain. Involuntarily the muscles in her long nimble legs ached to do these incredibly difficult feats that seemed so simple to the uninitiate. Nixon did a black-face single. His act was that of a dancing monologist, so that Ma Quail was justified in thinking that he should not have preceded Sally. His monologue was dullish stuff; his dancing nothing short of marvelous. His was perfect muscle control, exact rhythm sense, and an assumption of indolent ease in motion that carried with it a touch of humor. Sally had been on dozens of bills with him; knew him as a shy and quiet young man who called her Miss Sally and crushed himself up against the wall to let her pass; a decent young man, descended from a long line of hoofers; a personable enough young man with a lithe waist, a quick smile, white teeth, and a Midwestern accent. Born, he said, in Kansas City, but the world was his address. His costume—to which his black face lent the last touch of the ridiculous—was an exaggeration of the then fashionable male mode: peg-top trousers, wide silk lapels, saw-edged



sailor, pointed shoes. In contrast with this grotesquerie he seemed, off-stage, all the more shy and, somehow, engaging and boyish.

As he bounded off now, went on again for his bows, off, and turned toward the passage that led to his dressing room, Sally, ready to go on, forgot her own invariable nervousness in her interest at what she had just seen and envied.

"Where did you get that one?" She tried to do it. They were playing her cue music. It was time for her to go on.

"No," grinned Nixon, very earnest and polite behind the black smear that was his make-up. "Go on. You take 'em. I'll show you."

He was waiting for her when she came off—a thing that had never happened to her before. Trust Ma Quail for that.

"But I don't want to steal your stuff," Sally protested.

"Say, I'd be proud to have you even look at it, let alone want to catch it. Leave me show you how it goes."

"Mother's sick."

"Yeh. I heard. Say, that's too bad. How is she?"

"She's better, only she gets nervous if I don't come straight back to the room soon's I'm dressed. But maybe—just five minutes—"

They observed the proprieties by leaving her dressing-room door wide open. "Now look . . . . Naw! . . . Naw! . . . Look! One and two and three and slide and *turn* and one and two and three and slide and *turn* and . . . looka what I do with my knee there. . . . See? Naw! . . . Stiff. . . . That's it! You'll get it. Only you got to practise. I bet I was three months at it, mornings, before I put it in."

You got a mental picture of him, in dancing trunks, in his grubby hotel bedroom, solemnly and earnestly mastering the intricacies of this new step, his stage a carpet that had been worn gray and threadbare by many dancing mirthless feet.

Sally meant to tell her mother the cause of her delay. She didn't dream of not telling her. After all, she had picked up a new dance step. But when she reached her mother's room she found there a woman in such a state of hysteria, brought on by anxiety and general devilment, that she heard herself, to her own horror, making up some tale about having had her spot changed—moved down on the bill—a change for the better. She felt stricken at what she had done. Then she realized that she would have to do it again to-morrow—and next day—and the next—and the next. And suddenly a vista—not a wide one, but still a vista—opened out before her mind's eye. An hour to herself every day. Every day—an hour—to herself. She did not say this, even to herself. She did not even think she thought it. Something seemed to say it for her. She did not even think of a way to explain her explanation, should her mother recover before the end of the week. But she wouldn't be able, surely, to come to the theatre before the end of this week's bill. Sally hoped she would, of course—but she wouldn't.

Sally came out of the stage entrance after her afternoon performance that next day and stood a moment on the top step blinking almost dazedly at the dim, slimy, dour Chicago alley. It looked strangely bright to her, that alley; a sort of golden light suffused it. An hour. She had an hour. As she stood there, blinking a little, she was like a prisoner who, released after long years of servitude, stands huddled at the prison gates, fighting the impulse to creep back into the cold embrace of the gray walls that have so long sheltered him. So Sally thought, "Well, I guess I'll go right home."

But she didn't. Instead she began to stroll in a desultory manner down Clark Street, looking in the windows. She was conscious of a sensation of exhilaration, of buoyancy. That sordid thoroughfare, Clark Street, took on a fascination, a

sparkle, a brilliance. Sally saw in the window of a candy store a great square pan of freshly dipped dark brown chocolate creams. She went in and bought a little paper sackful. Her mother rarely allowed her to eat sweets. They were bad for her complexion. Sally now strolled on down the street, consuming her plump chocolates by a process as unladylike as it was difficult. You bit off the top of the cone-shaped sweet, or, if you preferred, you bit a small opening at the side, taking care not to make this too large, and including in this bite as little as possible of the creamy fondant beneath. This accomplished, the trick was to lick at the soft white filling with a little scooping flick of the tongue, much in the manner of a cat consuming a saucer of cream. Little by little, thus, the fondant melts on the tongue, disappears, leaving a hollow shell of chocolate, an empty cocoon. So Sally Quail, in her new freedom, strolled exulting down Clark Street, staring into the windows, stopping before some of them, her little pointed red tongue working busily away at the sweet held in her fingers, her face beatifically blank as the sugary stuff trickled down her grateful throat. There was even a little unsuspected dab of chocolate on one cheek, near her mouth. It gave her a most juvenile and engaging look.

She was thus engaged when Nixon approached her, breathing a trifle rapidly, as though he had been running. She showed, queerly enough, no surprise at seeing him. He fell into step beside her.

"I didn't see you go out. I was getting dressed. You must've jumped into your clothes."

"Blm," said Sally, companionably, her mouth full of fondant; and held the sack out to him, hospitably. He took one, ate it, took another, ate that, suddenly noticed her method, which she was pursuing calmly and without affectation.

"Say, that's a great system you got, Miss Sally. How'd you like to have one six feet high, and lick your way right through it!"

Sally laughed heartily at this, and so did he, though it wasn't very bright. And so, still giggling, they reached the Sherman House. And a little stricken look of contrition came into Sally's face. He said, "Well, so long. See you to-night. Uh—say, there's a little spot of chocolate on your cheek."

"Where?" And rubbed the wrong place.

"Right—there." He whipped out a handkerchief, put it back hastily, took out another, neatly folded, and held it up, hesitating. "If you don't mind—"

She didn't mind. He rubbed it off, gently. There was something intimate, something protective, about the act.

"See you to-night, Miss Sally."

"See you to-night."

On the way up she gave the remaining chocolates to the elevator boy. And then the usual questions, the usual answers. How many curtains? How much applause? How was the house? Was the headliner still high-hatting her?

The evening show.

Nixon wanted to introduce a song into his act. No, he couldn't sing, he told her. Not what you'd call sing. But you know. One of those coon songs. Kind of fresh up the act. He asked her advice about it. He hung on her answer. Her decision. Sally Quail, for whom everything was decided. Sally Quail, who never was allowed to do anything for anyone. Everything done for her. No one allowed her to do for them. Not her capable martinet mother, surely. It was sweet to have someone dependent on you for his decision; someone who thought your advice valuable—not valuable only, but invaluable. She was riding straight for catastrophe, was Sally Quail, without ever being warned of the road.

They watched each other's act, matinée and evening. She was there just the moment before he went on—that moment when the vaudeville actor "sets himself" for his entrance. She had seen them do all sorts of things for luck to last them through the concentrated fifteen minutes of an act. She had seen them cross themselves. She had seen them rub a tiny talisman. She had seen them mutter a prayer. Nixon, sprung from a long line of acrobats, black-face minstrels, hoofers, always went through a little series of meaningless motions before the final second that marked his entrance music. There was a little preliminary cough, a shuffle, a backward glance over his shoulder at nothing, a straightening of the absurd hat, tie, coat; a jerk at the coat lapel, a hunch of the shoulders, a setting of his features—all affording relief for strained nerves. Click! He was on, walking with that little exaggeration of the Negro shuffle, his arms hanging limp and loose and long, his eyes rolling tragically. He had rehearsed his new song and now he tried it out at the close of his act. It was one of those new coon songs and was called *I Guess I'll Have To Telegraph My Baby*. It was the type of plaintive comic that preceded the Jazz Blues of to-day. He had, really, no more of a singing voice than Sally. But he had a plaintive tonal quality, and a melodious resonance that caught and held you. He got two extra curtains on it, thus cutting in on Sally's act time. She did not resent this, though when he came off he apologized with something resembling tears in his eyes.

"Why, say, I didn't go for to crab your act, Miss Sally. Why, say, I wouldn't have done that for the world. Why, say—" He was incoherent, agonized.

Sally, set to go on, looked up at him. No girl of experience would have shown unconsciously the look that Sally turned upon him. Certainly her mother had never seen that look in her eyes. Her face was sparkling, animated, glowing.

Dimples flashed where dimples had not been. In that look you saw pride in the achievement of someone else—someone for whom she cared. She even said it.

"Don't be silly! I'm proud of you. Glad you stopped the show." And went on.

If Ma Quail had been there it would have taken the house manager, the stage hands, firemen, ushers, and doorman to hold her.

Ma Quail, in her hotel bedroom, had impatiently endured five days away from the theatre; five days without seeing her Sally go on; five days of domination by a nurse. The nurse left, always, at eight. This evening, as Ma Quail lay there, fuming, she was racked by a feeling of unrest, of danger to Sally. She had had that feeling before, and nothing had come of it. It was due, of course, to her unwholesome absorption in the girl, though she would not have admitted this even if she had recognized it as being true. The feeling grew, took complete possession of her. Sally was in the theatre. Sally was dressing; Sally would soon be going on. She could endure it no longer. Trembling and dizzy with the peculiar weakness that even a brief siege of this particular illness leaves, she dressed shakily, catching at chairs and tables for support. She took a carriage to convey her the short distance to the Olympic. Sick and shivering as she was, she actually seemed to take on a new strength and vigor as she passed the stage doorkeeper. She sniffed the theatre smell sensitively, gratefully. For years it had been incense in her nostrils. Sally would be almost ready to go on, now that her act had been shifted to a spot down on the bill. She actually resented this advantage having come to Sally without her mother having fought for it. Up the winding iron stairway; down the narrow dim hall; a smile of anticipation on her face. She turned the knob of Sally's

dressling-room door; she opened the door softly, softly, so as to surprise her Sally.

Sally Quail, with her head thrown back, was looking into the eyes of Jimmy Nixon, of the Dancing Nixons. Nixon's arms were close about her. Sally's eyes were half closed. Her chin was lifted with shy upward eagerness. Her mouth was tremulous and ripe and flexible—the lips of a woman who knows that she is about to be kissed. It was a kiss she never received.

"I love you, Sally," said Nixon.

And, "Oh, I love you, too," said Sally Quail. Her voice was a breath, a whisper.

There was something terrible, something indecent about Ma Quail's ruthless tearing apart of these two young things. She did it so horribly, so brutally. Her jewel was being stolen. The flower that she had tended and nurtured was being plucked by clumsy alien hands. Ugly words bubbled to her lips and broke there.

"Get out of here!" She slammed the door, advanced menacingly. She actually seemed about to strike him. "Get out of here you—you cheap hoofer, you! Get out or I'll have you thrown out!" She turned to the girl. "You fool! You little fool!"

Nixon unclasped the girl, but he still held her hand in his. As always, under emotion, he spoke the slow and drawling tongue of the born Kansan.

"You can't talk thataway to us, ma'am."

Sally said nothing. Her face was white and drawn and old. The sight of it whipped Ma Quail into fresh fury.

"Can't!" she spat out in a whisper that had all the vehemence of a scream. "I'll can't you! Get out of here, you bum, you! I'll have you thrown out of the circuit. I'll fix it so you'll never show in any decent house again. I'll—" uncon-

sciously she used a term she had heard somewhere in cheap melodrama—"I'll break you!"

He grinned at that. He took a step toward her, drawing the frightened girl with him. "Come on, Sally," he said quietly. "Come on away out of here."

"I'm afraid," whispered Sally. "I'm afraid. Where?"

"You know," he said. "What we were talking about. Nixon and Quail."

But at that, of course, Ma Quail fainted for the first time in her life. And when she had been revived she insisted that she was dying, and Nixon had been sent out of the room, and they took off her stays, and rubbed her hands and gave her whiskey, and she rolled her eyes, and groaned, and made Sally promise, over and over, that she would never see Nixon again. It was her dying wish. She was dying. Sally had killed her. And of course Sally promised, racked by self-reproach. And that was the end of that, and, everyone will admit, a good thing for Sally.

Ma Quail prevailed on the management to retain Sally's act for another week, which broke up contact with Nixon in the next week's bill, scheduled for Milwaukee.

Sally probably forgot all about it in later years. Curiously enough, she never would talk about it, even to her mother. And though the prince her mother was expecting never came, practically everything else in life did. Fame, and fortune, and popularity, and friendship. A house in London, a house in New York, an apartment in Paris. Private trains. Perhaps no woman of the theatre ever made (honestly) such fantastic sums as Sally Quail earned yearly for twenty years. Under her indomitable mother's shrewd management she became polished, finished, exquisite in her art, though she managed, somehow, miraculously, to retain something of her girlishness and simplicity and loveliness to the end. Still, sometimes if you glimpsed the two driving



on Fifth Avenue or in the Bois, you wondered about Sally. You saw them driving in one of those long low foreign cars that are almost all engine. One of those cars that proclaims the fact that its owner has at least two others. You know. It had a hood over the back, but no hood in the front, so that the chauffeur and a good half of the delicate upholstery were unprotected. It was a proud and insolent car that said, "I am a bibelot. I am a luxury. I am practically no good at all except when the sun is shining—but not shining too hotly. When it is fair, but not too cool. I am only to be used at special times by special people. I am the specialest kind of car for people who don't have to care a damn. I am money. Look about you. You won't see many like me."

Sally looked none too glowingly happy in the hooded depths of this gorgeous vehicle, a luxurious fur rug tucked about her gifted knees, a toy dog sticking his tongue out at passers-by in lesser cars.

Sally Quail's tragic and untimely death broke her mother completely—or almost completely. Small wonder. Still, she derived a crumb of comfort from the touching and heart-breaking last moment that preceded Sally's going. In the midst of the fever that consumed her she had what seemed to be a lucid last moment just before the end. Ma Quail told of it, often and often, over and over, to sympathetic friends.

For at the end, as she lay there, looking, in her terrible illness, much much more than her forty years, suddenly her face had assumed the strangest look—the look of a girl of twenty. There was about it a delicacy, a glow. She sat up in bed as though she were strong and well again. All the little lines in her face were wiped out queerly, completely, as though by a magic hand. She lifted her chin a little with a shy upward eagerness and her fever-dried lips took on the tremulousness and the flexibility of the lips of a woman who

knows that she is about to be kissed. Her arms were outstretched, her eyes fixed on something that she found wonderful and beautiful.

"Sally!" Ma Quail had screamed. "Sally! What is it! What is it! Oh, my God! Look at me. It's Mother! Mother loves you!"

And, "Oh, I love you, too!" said Sally Quail. Her voice was a breath, a whisper.



## WHITE ON BLACK<sup>1</sup>

BY TESS SLESINGER

*One of the private schools attended by the "nice" children of the West Side some twenty years ago followed not only the liberal practice of mixing rich and poor, Gentile and Jew, but made a point also of including Negroes. The few scattered colored children contributed practically to our liberal education. But what effect we had in turn upon them, it is impossible for one of us to judge.*

ONE OF the private schools attended by the "nice" children of the West Side some twenty years ago followed not only the liberal practice of mixing rich and poor, Gentile and Jew, but made a point also of including Negroes. Not many, of course—just enough so that when the eye of a visiting parent roved down the rows of pink and white faces collected for the Harvest Festival or the Easter Play, it stumbled complacently here and there—perhaps three or four times in all the auditorium—on an equally scrubbed black one sticking out like a solitary violet in a bed of primroses. For, except in the case of two sisters, or of a brother and sister, these black children never made friends among themselves, seldom even to the extent of choosing seats side by side in assemblies.

I suppose that the effect upon the rest of us was, as it was

<sup>1</sup> From *Time: The Present* by Tess Slesinger (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1935). Reprinted by courtesy of the author.

intended to be, on the whole good. It must have taught us well-bred little boys and girls at the least the untruth of the common slander that Negroes have an unpleasant odor; for certainly none of the Wilsons and Whites and Washingtons in our school ever smelt of anything but soap. And we were brought up, through weekly ethics lessons and the influence of the inevitable elderly lady teacher who had never got Harriet Beecher Stowe out of her mind, to the axiom that all men were created equal.

The few scattered colored children in clean clothes, then, contributed practically to our liberal education. But what effect we, in our more than clean, our often luxurious clothes and with our pink and white faces, had in turn upon them, it is impossible for one of us to judge. Although I can tell you today what has happened since to a number of my old schoolmates, even to those in whom I have long ceased to be interested, and although I run every year across gossip concerning still others, none of us has any idea what happened to our colored classmates. Some of them left school before the high-school years were over; some of them were graduated and stood at our elbows with their rolled-up diplomas; but all of them have equally dropped out of our common knowledge since. Where are they now? Did they drift back to Harlem, those Wilsons and Washingtons and Whites? How do they look back upon their ten years' interlude with white children? I cannot imagine. But I remember vividly the school careers of the two who were in my class.

The Wilsons, brother and sister, joined us in the sixth grade. Paul was exquisitely made, his face chiseled and without fault; a pair of delicately dilated nostrils at the end of a short fine nose, and an aureole of dim black curls. Elizabeth was bigger, coarser, more negroid; darker, her

lips were thick, her nose less perfect; but still she was a beautiful child, luxuriously made, and promising to develop into a type of the voluptuous Negro woman at her best. Elizabeth was older than Paul; but her brain, like her nose, was less sharp, and both were put into the same class.

For the first week or two our kind teachers paid them the surplus attention which was always extended to Negro, or crippled, or poverty-stricken children. They suggested that Paul be chosen when the boys were choosing up sides; they asked the girls to take Elizabeth as partner. The children stood off from them no more than they stood off from any newcomers. We were not adultly snobbish; we merely glared at all newcomers in our world until they should prove themselves worthy. But by the end of the month, there was no longer any question of choosing Paul: Paul himself was the chooser and the permanently chosen; likewise Elizabeth was besieged with requests for the seats on either side of her in assembly, and it became an honor to have a seat in the same row; and the teachers turned round, and were given rather to suppressing the colored Wilsons than to bringing them out.

For after a certain natural humility had worn off, Paul and Elizabeth were not merely taken into the group; they took over the group. Including the faculty. They were a smashing success. For one thing, they feared nothing; furthermore, they proved marvelous athletes; and they were born leaders. Electing Paul to the captaincy of the basketball team was a mere formality; even if he hadn't richly deserved it, he would have permitted no one else to hold it. Elizabeth was as strong as a horse, less skilful, less graceful than he, but easily outshining, by her animal strength and fearlessness, all the white girls in the class. Beside their athletic prowess, which alone would have won them popularity in a class of eleven-year-olds, both of them were gifted

with an over-powering jubilancy and a triumphant bullying wit, which inevitably made them czars.

They ruled the class with a rod of iron, chose their intimates, played with them, dropped them, and patronized the teachers. Their power spread to politics; by the end of the first year Paul was president of the class, and Elizabeth, who could not spell, secretary. Their class-meetings were masterpieces of irreverent wit and bedlam, subtly dominated by the tacitly authoritative Paul. The teachers turned over to them the difficult business of controlling the class after recess, and Paul, in his double capacity of legal president and illegal czar, easily succeeded where they had long failed. Even his sister, who was no small power among the girls, feared and adored him. If her authority was for one moment questioned, she had only to say, "I'll call Paul . . ."

I remember myself—and probably not a few others of the dazzled little white girls did the same in secret—going home to dream about marrying Paul and taking Elizabeth to live with us. I remember a moment of certainly unprecedented and of almost unsurpassed voluptuous pleasure on an occasion when Paul, twisting his wiry body into one of those marvelous knots from which he unrolled himself to shoot a basket, stretched so far that his shirt left his trousers and revealed a few inches of coffee-colored skin glistening with sweat, which caused me to gasp with delight. We girls chose to play against the boys of the class rather than among ourselves, and I was surely not the only girl who had voted favorably for the pure delight of being tossed on the ground and swung round the hips by the jubilant Paul, who had, beside his lovely body and fierce little nostrils, not the slightest inhibition.

For two years the noisy Wilsons demoralized the entire class into a raucous group that was never tired of wrestling, playing basketball, shouting jokes, and merrily defying

the teachers. Not even the famous Seventh Grade Trouble, which involved the Wilsons as central figures, subdued them. Not even the visit, upon that terrifying occasion, of their mother. All of us made a point of walking past the principal's office to view Mrs. Wilson, who sat there, dressed in black and with her face held low and ashamed as though she were the culprit herself. We whispered afterward, among ourselves, of what a lady Mrs. Wilson was; we had never before seen a colored lady.

The high-school years loomed ahead. We were to be joined by another section of the same grade, and we were determined to maintain our solidarity with Paul at our head. Our reputation as a champion class had preceded us; but with it, we soon noticed, a reputation for rowdiness. Paul was instantly elected captain of the basketball team. But he was just nosed out of the presidency by a white boy belonging to the other section, who must have gained some treacherous votes from among our own. Although the other boy occupied the chair, Paul managed, for half a year, to bully even the new section into slowly waning submission to the last echoes of his power.

Elizabeth's popularity remained limited to the girls in our own old section. The others adopted her at first as a novelty, but they had not been trained to her loud hearty jokes and her powerful wrestling, and soon tired of her and left her to her old companions. These dwindled slowly, as we girls gained consciousness of our status as girls and wished to dissociate ourselves from anything rowdy. Of course it was our fault—we could have pushed Elizabeth forward and remained loyal to her—but we had so many things to think of in those days. And I think something of the sort was bound to happen to Elizabeth anyway; she did not have the native personality to warrant and sustain the unlimited popularity which had fallen on her partly be-

cause of her strength and partly because she was her brother's sister. There was a quiet girl in our class, less mature than the rest of us—who were, in that first year of high-school, more fiercely mature than some of us are today, which is ten years later. This girl, Diana, fastened upon Elizabeth as a chum, and from now on the curious pair were inseparable.

I remember the early days when it became the thing for the boys to take the girls to the corner soda-store after basketball game, and for each boy to treat one girl to a fudge sundæ. We couldn't help noticing that the boys, so eager to rough-house with Elizabeth in the classroom, hesitated among themselves as to which should treat her, and that the same one never treated her twice. We noticed too, that the soda-clerk stared at the dark blemish in our small white group. Elizabeth never seemed to notice anything; she developed a habit of kidding the soda-clerk in a loud professional voice, and soon our indignation was shifted to her, and we told her to lower her voice and not fool around with soda-clerks. Toward the end of the year Diana and Elizabeth disassociated themselves from our group, and began to occupy a little table by themselves in a corner. Here they would sit and pretend to be alone, and we could hear them giggling and whispering happily. Paul, of course, was still too young and too "manly" ever to join these parties.

In the course of that first year in high-school many things beside the soda-parties happened to us. Wrestling between boys and girls was outlawed, the girls began to loop their hair in buns over the ears, and the boys began to appear in navy-blue long trousers.

I remember Paul in his first longies. Instead of navy-blue, he appeared in a sleek suit of light Broadway tan, nicely nipped in at the waist, which harmonized with his clear



mocha skin and showed off his dapper little figure to perfection. But it didn't quite fit in our school. I noticed that day, standing in line behind him to buy lunch tickets, that he wore brand new shoes: they were long and very pointed, and polished a brilliant ochre; they were button shoes, with cloth tops; they squeaked like nothing else in the world. I remember staring at them, and wondering where I had seen shoes like those before: was it in the elevator at home?

We were so grown-up that year that instead of shooting baskets in the twenty-minute recess that followed lunch, we got one girl to play the piano and the rest of us danced. Only about half of the boys were bold enough to dance; Paul still belonged to the group which stood in a corner and laughed and imitated their bolder friends, waiting for younger girls to be imported into the high-school department next year. With one boy to every pair of girls, it was not surprising that Elizabeth danced more than half of her dances with her friend Diana. The rest of us paired off with our girl-friends equally often.

But for no reason that anyone could see, Elizabeth's friends still diminished week by week. She had occasional spurts of her old popularity, but these were chiefly occasioned by reaction against some more stable idol, who would soon be restored to her post. Elizabeth's one permanent friend was Diana, the quiet little blonde girl who had no other friends. As far as I know, Diana was the only girl who ever invited Elizabeth to her house, and it was rumored that Diana was the only one who had seen the inside of the Wilson house, but Diana could be made neither to say whether it was true, nor what it was like if she had seen it. As for the rest of us, we were a little uncomfortable about omitting Elizabeth at afternoon parties at our homes; but somebody's mother settled it for us by saying that she

thought it would be an unkindness to the little colored girl to invite her to a home where there would be none of her own people. This conflicted, of course, with the lesson of our ethics classes, but we were thirteen-going-on-fourteen, and we had too much to think about, so we let it go at that.

Meanwhile Paul, who had remained captain all the first year, failed to be elected for the second. Some of his classmates started propaganda to the effect that, while still their best player, he was no good as a captain, and they self-righteously elected the second-best player in his stead. Paul took out his anger in refusing to coöperate with the team, and developed into a poor sport, that worst of anathemas in school, successfully hogging the ball so that no one else had a chance. The epithet poor sport began to be whispered about the classroom, and when class elections for the second year were held, Paul was not even nominated for an office. Our section had sworn to stand by him when we had suffered defeat at the beginning of the year, but when the time came we simply sat and held our tongues, and elected another boy from the hostile section.

When the Wilsons returned for the second year after vacation, they looked a little different to us. Paul had turned into something resembling an uptown beau, and Elizabeth's face had grown coarser. Elizabeth joined her friend Diana at once, and their companionship remained unbroken. Paul, however, held in considerably less esteem, remained aloof, making no effort to regain his lost popularity, and pursued his way sullenly and almost defiantly among us. He met our reproaches with indifference.

That year evening dances broke out among us. For the sake of girls who might never be asked, there was a rule that everyone must come unescorted and unescorting. It was easy enough, of course, to break the rule. Most of the girls came regularly attended by boys from the upper classes.

Elizabeth came the first few times with her brother, which was as good as coming unattended. Paul stood in a corner with the stags; Elizabeth sat with the other girls who had come unattended or attended by brothers, looking very dark and strange in her short-sleeved light dresses, and accepted gratefully her few opportunities to dance.

There began to be whispers among us of what we would do if Paul asked one of us to come to a dance with him, or offered a treat to a soda. We admitted to feeling uncomfortable at the thought of being seen on the street with him. At the same time we realized that what we were contemplating was horribly unfair. But Evelyn—Evelyn, who led our class in social matters because at fourteen she wore rouge and baby French heels—said, "School is school; it's not the World; it's not our Real Lives," and we let it go at that. As we had tacitly adopted policies toward Elizabeth, we now officially adopted one toward Paul; we were to be extra nice to him, but not in the way that one treats a boy; and we were to dance with him when he asked us, but very kindly refuse his invitations to escort us anywhere outside the school walls. Fortunately for our peace of mind, ethics lessons were that year changed to weekly lessons in elocution for the girls, and public speaking for the boys.

But none of us was given the chance to refuse him. So far as I know, he never asked a girl to go anywhere with him, never left the stag-line at our Friday night dances, and after the first half-dozen, he never even came with Elizabeth. He scrupulously avoided even the careless physical contacts in the elevator, of which the other boys took modest advantage. Also, when we followed our policy of being nice to him in school, we found ourselves politely ignored. Paul grew increasingly sullen, even occasionally rude, and one girl reported that he had passed her on the street and pretended not to see her, neglecting to lift his elegant tan felt hat.

In the middle of that year Elizabeth's friend Diana was withdrawn from the school by her parents and sent to a boarding-school in the South, rumor said to get her away from the black girl and teach her a proper sense of color.

With her friend gone, Elizabeth picked up smaller fry and dazzled them, because, unlike Paul, she seemed to want never to be alone. But even with these she learned to disappear at the school door, or at most to walk no further with a white classmate than the end of the school block. There, making some excuse about having to hurry, or going in another direction, she would dash away with a good-humored smile. I remember watching her running away from us once and wondering to what strange world she disappeared every day after school.

Of course, not one of the nice girls in our school would have dreamed of hurting Elizabeth's feelings by suggesting that she leave us on the street, but there must have been some hesitating on the corner before Elizabeth so effectively learned that her position with her white schoolmates ended with the school door. Or could it have been that dark lady, who had sat in the principal's office with her head lowered as though she were the culprit, that time of the Seventh Grade Trouble? But no matter, we were in our third year of high-school now, and had forgotten the seventh grade as we had forgotten the famous trouble, and were used now to seeing our dark classmate hurry off after school and run down the long block, leaving us standing on the corner, discussing our this and that, which was so awfully important to us. . . .

In the third year of high-school, Paul simply did not appear. We were, I suppose, faintly relieved, in so far as we thought about him at all. He removed, after all, such uncomfortable questions as playing other schools with a Negro on our first team. And our own old section, our merry,

rowdy section, of which Paul had once been undisputed king, had imperceptibly melted away, the boundary line was wavery, our old loyalty vague, a thing of the past; Paul, so far as he was anything in our minds, was a memory belonging to our lost section. When we asked Elizabeth what had happened to him, she told us he was going to another school because he didn't like girls and considered our private school sissy. She carried it off rather well, I think. One or two of us suggested that he might have been fired, because we all knew that his work had gone off badly in that last year.

Elizabeth herself, in those last two years, toned down considerably. Her prowess in studies had never been great, and she seemed now to be devoting more time to them. Her athletic ability had not lived up to its promise, because she had been after all primarily interested in rough-neck play, and seemed unable or unwilling to tame her strength and spirits into rules and skill. She abandoned the bright colors she had worn as a child, and came to school in neat and modest dresses. She dropped without reluctance into the common order of students, learned to toady as she had once been toadied to, and managed to keep up a decent sober reputation which insured her a mild amount of companionship, restricted, of course, to within the school walls. On committees Elizabeth volunteered for unpleasant jobs and carried them out cheerfully and efficiently. She grew generous and sweet-tempered, and a little like a servant; and like a servant, she was thanked for her services and forgotten.

Paul had dropped out of our existence.

The last time I saw either of them was at our graduation dance. Elizabeth had long ago given up coming alone to our dances, but she came, of course, to this one, looking rather too burly and black in the prescribed white dress, with bare

arms which hung like bones from her ungainly shoulders. She was the whole of the committee on refreshments, and all during the first part of the evening she stood behind a table with her diploma tucked on a rack over her head—nobody from her family had come to see her be graduated—and cheerfully dispensed sandwiches and ice-cream.

Everybody was mingling proudly in the big assembly room, waiting for the chairs to be removed for dancing; everybody was very nice to Elizabeth and even took down her address as a matter of form, but in the rush of taking addresses that really meant something and comparing notes about future colleges, she was forgotten, and if it hadn't been for a teacher who came to her rescue, she might have been completely alone. When the dancing began, the teacher led her away from the buffet table with her arm around her, to bring her to the row of chairs where girls sat waiting for partners.

Some of us must have had compunctions—I know I did—floating by her in our partners' arms, for on that night the least popular girl had achieved a faithful escort, if only by importing boys from classes below who felt it an honor to be there at all. But none of us felt badly enough to urge our partners to leave us and dance with Elizabeth. Later one or two boys danced a waltz with her, because a waltz was the least difficult thing to sacrifice. She sat all evening and talked cheerfully to the teacher. She looked uncomplaining, as though she had quietly learned her place. She even seemed to enjoy watching the rest of us dance.

The evening broke up on a high-note of "See you again," "Don't forget," and "Oh, the most marvelous time!" and I remember emerging from the dance-room in a fever of happiness, walking on winged feet. I pushed my way through the gay crowd outside the door. Somebody tapped me on the arm: "Miss!" I turned and saw, for the first time in three

years, Paul Wilson, the king of our old section! I smiled eagerly, delighted to see him again. "Why, Paul!" I exclaimed, holding out my hand.

He was as beautiful as he had been three years before, but his face was different, hardened perhaps, so that the dapper tan clothes he wore made him cheap and flashy. He still wore pointed button shoes with cloth tops. He was standing by the wall with his hat pulled down over his eyes. "Why, Paul!" I said.

He looked up, caught my eye, and shifted his away as though he had failed to recognize me. He looked down at the floor and spoke in a low voice. "Miss, would you mind finding my sister Elizabeth Wilson inside and say her brother is waiting for her?" He stuck his hands suddenly into his pockets with something of his old sullen gesture.

I remember turning from him with an overpowering sense of guilt to spare him embarrassment, and going back with tears burning my eyes to find Elizabeth. I left him standing there against the wall, with his hat over his eyes, snubbing his former classmates, while they passed their former god and leader, some of them too happy to distinguish his features under that hat, others no doubt turning from him to prevent his embarrassment, and even, on that happy night, to spare themselves. . . . This should have been his graduation.



## SHERREL<sup>1</sup>

BY WHIT BURNETT

*This is how I figure it out. I killed my brother by meanness. And it is too bad. I wouldn't do it now. . . . And I've been thinking, what if I should write a poem—here I am alive and everything and sign it not Mark but Sherrel? Do you see what I mean? After a while I would just go ahead and use it. And then I would be more him too—Sherrel?*

I do not know whether I can do this thing or not. Maybe it is just a thought, maybe I just think it is necessary to do it. I mean about the name. I have thought about it a lot though and it keeps urging at me. It is not easy to understand. But I must try to understand and explain it.

You see, I actually did have a brother. People sometimes asked me, Are you the only boy in the family? and I've said, Yes. This wasn't a lie wholly. I was the first born in my family. But there were others, two others. One died in long clothes. We have his picture at home. The other was named Sherrel.

It is easy to remember him. My mother had us photographed together, for instance. And one especial print was transferred onto little smooth discs the size of a saucer. The discs fit into small twisted wire easels and my brother and

<sup>1</sup> From *The Best Short Stories of 1932*, edited by Edward J. O'Brien (New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1932). Reprinted by permission of the author.



I used to sit on the easel like that on my mother's bureau in the bedroom.

He was, as I said, younger than I. This is important. The neighbors used to say, It's the difference in their ages. They tried to explain in that way why I was so mean. And you can see the difference clearly enough on the picture discs. We both stood by the photographer's chair, a plush chair. But I was up to the top of it. My brother's hand rested on the arm. It looks pretty small to me now because I'm twice as old as I was then. We both wore black velvet tam-o'-shanters and dark red velvet coats and pants. My mouth was a little open, too, looking at the photographer. I did not touch my brother. He had one hand, which was very small, on the chair, and the other one had hold of me. His hair was lighter than mine and softer and his eyes wider and bluer. He had a small mouth like a flower and it was smiling. He was a beautiful child. This was the brother I killed.

I am not telling you about a melodrama. I won't be arrested and hanged. I did not kill him yesterday. It was a long time ago, in fact, and I do not remember it all the time, only sometimes when something suggests the way I was then or when some one asks, Have you any other brothers? And I say, No. And here too in this other town at this school except for a girl I know I am quite alone in certain ways and in the winter as now I have seen any number of things to remind me. There is, for example, an epidemic of smallpox here and instead of smooth fast automobile hearses they still have funeral carriages that drag along slowly through the streets. Only once have I ridden in such a carriage. And that was then.

There are some things difficult to remember out of childhood. I do not remember when my brother was born. There was not so much difference then. Only four years before,

I had been born. But I remember clearly when I was nine. My brother then was five. And we were two in the family. But I was the first.

Do you know how this is? Nine and five? Well, nine is somebody. Five is still curls. At nine I have seen something of the world. What have you seen at five? Go on, you can't come with us! Go on back to the house! We're going down to the store. You'll get run over. Go on, you can't play with us. You ain't big enough. Go on, grow up some before you come tagging around after us. Who asked you along? Beat it! I know how that is. I said all that, more brutally even. He didn't say anything. He didn't cry or whine or crab. I probably would have. He stopped following simply and stood there. And then we ran off. He stood alone. Sometimes I found him other places alone, sitting still in a corner thinking quietly about something. I am always a little puzzled now I am older. I have talked it over with others. He would have been important. . . . But at nine one is a weed, growing wild. Five is still in the hothouse.

We lived near the sandhills. It wasn't until several years later that I really got into the hills exploring them with a cousin of my own age. Sherrel never did get there. And there was a great liking in both of us for the hills, his maybe different from mine. I often found him sitting dreaming, looking at them. But one day late in the Spring the hills in a way came down to our house. A cloudburst drenched them, rolling down soft sand, cutting great ditches in the road in front of our place. We weren't long in discovering that, I'll tell you. When Sherrel wandered out of the kitchen the ditch was full of us kids. It was a peach of a ditch as high as our heads, gnawed with caves and dangers.

I started the discoveries. There's some hole, I yelled. And down I had gone, doing what the others wanted to do, the first to absorb their wishes. Then they followed, yelling too.

Sherrel, I suppose, could hear my voice coming up out of the ground. He came over to the ditch and looked down, standing alone above us. Go on back, I shouted, you'll fall in. He moved away. I paid no more attention then to him and the rest of us ran racing, hiding, searching, together in the wash.

And then, separated from the others for a moment or so, I noticed something odd about my hands. Hey, kids, I cried, lookee! Look at my hands! They looked. They stood back in wonderment. They looked at their own hands. No, they couldn't, they said. It was something funny. Look what Martin can do! Lookee, he can peel off his hands! It was true, something had happened to my hands. I took hold and pulled off long shreds of skin. I amazed them all. They stood astounded.

Let me see, said somebody. It was Sherrel.

Say, I yelled, didn't I say not to come down here? You ain't big enough to be in this here ditch. Let me see your hands, he said. The kids were all looking at me. I'll let you see, all right! I said. He stood his ground and didn't go. That makes me mad, I felt. No, I said. I took him by the shoulder and talked straight in his face, hard. How many times do I have to tell you to get out of this ditch! He turned around and walked up the gorge to a shallower spot and climbed slowly out.

A day or so later Sherrel stayed in bed. There's something the matter with him, my mother said. She didn't know what. Then he took a high fever, they said, and was delirious. I thought it was strange about delirious. Sherrel's eyes were shut and he looked as if he was sleeping but he was talking without any sense. We'll have to have a doctor, my mother said. And that afternoon the doctor came to our house, wiping his feet at the door and entering with a serious look. Let's see the other young fellow, he said. Anything wrong

with him? He had a little sore throat, my mother said, but he's all right. He looked down my throat. Look at my hands, I said, ain't they funny?

What I thought, he said.

The same afternoon a man from down town came and nailed up a yellow flag. It was a cloth sign saying, black on orange, Scarlet Fever. I couldn't go out of the yard. That's sure tough, the kids said, peering through the pickets. I even had to keep back from the fence, too. It was catching.

I sat on the steps fronting north from our bare two room brick house and looked at the hills. I had had the Scarlet Fever and hadn't even known it. Why, my mother said, he was playing around all the time. Why, he was out there playing in the ditch with all those children. That's bad, said the doctor. But my brother was worse. He had it good.

I remember the windows in the front room were darkened and my mother never went to bed. She never took her clothes off. And my father didn't go to work. My aunt came to the fence with a bag of oranges and bananas. How is he? she asked. If he isn't any better Dr. Anderson says he'd better have a consultation, said my mother. How is Dr. Anderson? asked my aunt. He is the best doctor in town, my mother said.

I sat in the sun all tired now and weak. But I wasn't sick. I was big and nine.

I remember the consultation. There were four doctors in the kitchen standing around and talking low and sitting down and getting up. I could see in from outside. My mother was nervous and walking around and my father, who was a big heavy man, stood around too and sat down and then got up. They were waiting for something definite they spoke of that I could not understand. It was the Crisis. I asked what it was, and my mother had said, Sherrel will get better then. I didn't know what a Crisis would be like and

I opened the door slowly and got into the house quietly, past the doctors.

My father and mother were in the front room by the bed where Sherrel lay. He was still and wasn't talking deliriously. And then my mother, who was standing by him with my father waiting, suddenly cried terribly for a minute or so, and then she took hold of my father and pulled him down by the bed to the floor. I didn't know what was happening. I was frightened, too. Pray, she sobbed. Pray, if you never prayed before. Oh, God, she began . . . and she was crying more and more. My father was kneeling heavily and strangely in a big dark bulk. He put his arm round my mother. There, there, he said. I never saw them like that before. My father is English, my mother is German. I did not think about that though then. I thought, I am scared; this is all different, and dark. I stood in the doorway, too frightened to move.

Come in, Martin, my mother suddenly cried out to me. Come in to your brother. Come here with us. I came over, and there we were all kneeling down together.

Do you want your brother to die? she asked. No, I said. I was frightened at her, at the strange heavy silence on my father, at my brother even. Go and look at him, she told me.

I got up and looked at my brother's white face. It was like a face of ivory with pale lips. I looked hard. He was different, too. What do I do? I thought. I am rough, not like that. My mother is looking at me terribly. Kiss him. I bent over and touched his face. His lips opened with a quiet breath, like a little flower bursting on my cheek.

The Crisis came and passed. It came while we were in the room there. My mother could not wait. She went to the bed, trying to wake my brother. Look, Sherrel, she whispered, we are going to get you the nice pearl-handled pocket-knife to-morrow. You won't have to wait till Christmas.

To-morrow. You just get well, now. Sherrel! Do you hear me, Sherrel?

Or, he can have mine, I thought.

But he didn't hear us. He didn't hear anybody. Then my mother went to sleep suddenly, it seemed, and drooped down by the bed and they put her in the other room on a couch.

I stood in the dark by a curtain when the doctors came in. Too bad, said Dr. Anderson. He leaned over my brother. Remarkable head, said one of the others. Isn't it! spoke up another one. Artist's head, said the one with the beard. Yes . . . Then the doctors walked out together into the room where my mother was and in a little while they all left the house.

A few days later there were the strange preparations for the funeral. I don't want to dwell on the funeral. That is not the point. But we rode in a carriage shut in by ourselves, still quarantined, the others following slowly behind us. I remember we passed the Watsons' place. They were standing at the gate, the family, staring stupidly at the procession as the horse carriages jogged down the hilly street rolling off to the cemetery.

This is all strange, I thought, riding along past the Watsons' house in a carriage like this. My mother and my father and myself. I was taken up with the thought and looked back out of the carriage window now and then at the carriages behind me. My mother pulled me back to sit up straight. My mother's face was drawn and tired and she was crying. My father's eyes had tears in them too. I could not cry. I thought, I ought to cry. How can I cry? I am not hurt in any place where I can feel. I squeezed into the corner of the carriage opposite them, pressing up against one hand hard to make it hurt. It turned numb and pained, but not

in a crying way. You cry easy differently, I thought. Onions, for instance, make you cry. Would it have been a trick, I thought, or right and honest if I had put an onion in my handkerchief, no one seeing me, and then smelt it now and then in the curtained shadows of the carriage? I would have cried then. I wanted to cry. But all I could think was, Sherrel was a queer kid. Were we brothers sure enough? Am I anybody's brother? Why don't I cry? . . .

You see, he would sit in a corner quiet and frailly beautiful. I was nine and active. It's the difference in their ages. Maybe so. There were the Elwell brothers, now. They were twins. They had a carpenter's shop. It was a peach of a shop down in the cellar and they worked together great, making book-ends and rabbit hutches and things like that.

I gave him that sickness. I knew that. That killed him. That is why my brother is dead. But I am trying to remember, to clear things up. I am trying to remember if I thought that then. I remember I thought, It's funny just he got it. Why not Leona Eads, Ed or Billy Simons? They touched my hands. I wondered if I hadn't forced my sickness on my brother out of hatred for him, out of my own peculiar older-brother hatred. Did I slap him, maybe strike him in the face with my peeling hand? Perhaps I did. I wondered over this for many weeks now and then.

I'm not even sure now. I might have. It's funny how mean, you see, a person can be. I've thought of that. I've got a girl. I've talked things over with her, not everything, but generally you know. She doesn't like meanness either. I remember when I was about twelve, my sister was just coming along then. She was about two and I had to tend her occasionally. I didn't like it. Once my mother said to me, Do you want your little sister to die too? Well, no, I said. She might even have said, Do you want to kill your

little sister too? Maybe this was it, because I asked myself that a lot later, trying to be better. I said, Do you want to kill your sister too? No, I said.

I didn't either. But I remembered what I'd said when she was born. I said, There's enough in this family already. But I didn't want to kill her. Still I had killed my brother. I had killed Sherrel. Not only by giving him sickness. But by meanness.

This is how I figure it now. I killed my brother by meanness. And it is too bad. I wouldn't do it now. I am not that way. I could have got him a job here in this other town where I am now after he got out of school. I'll be out of school here pretty soon. I'm eighteen next week. Then I'll go on a paper where I've got a stand-in. I'd have said, Now you keep on at school and read a lot of good things, good books, you know, poetry and good things and learning how to write. You've got good stuff in you, I can tell. You're going to be an artist. So am I. We'll be two artists, brothers, maybe different, but we can help each other. You've got a poetic style, and I've got a stronger style. I see things more as they are. I'm a little tougher. I can digest more. But that's all right. When I get going, I'll help you. You've got fine things in you. I'll help you bring them out.

That's the kind of person he would have been. He would have been an artist. There's nothing any bigger than that. Nothing finer. It's the best, in a holy way. It has to be in you first. It hides sometimes and doesn't get a chance to come out where people are.

I've talked that over with people, with that girl I spoke of. I want to be an artist. A writer. I can see back from where I am, though. I've been pretty mean, pretty contemptible. It's funny to look back like that and see yourself in old pictures and things. It's hard to think you had the same name, even.



And that's what I'm puzzling over now. There's nothing wrong with my name, actually. Mark. Mark Stowe. It was first Martin. It was even Martin Tilton Stowe. I didn't like it. All that, I mean. I cut it down to Mark Stowe. It made me feel surer, quicker, stronger.

But even that doesn't quite go. It doesn't all fit. I'm not all blunt, like that. Mark. Mark Stowe. I've got other things. I've written poems, even, and I wouldn't kiss a girl hard. I know how my brother was. He would have been like that too, only a lot more.

And, you know, about the name . . . My folks are getting along now. Sisters don't count, the way I mean, that is. I'm the only boy in the family. And I've been thinking, what if I should write a poem, a long, good one—here I am, alive and everything—and sign it not Mark Stowe but well, Sherrel Stowe? Do you see what I mean? And then by and by there would be another poem, and after awhile I would just go ahead and use it right along. Can you understand that? How I would be more him too, then—Sherrel?



## THE RAINY DAY, THE GOOD MOTHER AND THE BROWN SUIT<sup>1</sup>

BY DOROTHY CANFIELD

*She was really a very good mother. She remembered that the basis of child-rearing is to understand each child at all times, and went resolutely into the room, determined to understand Freddy, if it were her last act.*

AND yet she had done exactly what the books on child training assured mothers would ward off trouble on a stormy day. She had copied off the list of raw material recommended by the author of "The Happy Child Is the Active Child": colored paper, blunt scissors, paste, pencils, crayons, plasticine—she had bought them all, well ahead of time, and had brought them out this morning after breakfast, when the rain settled down with that all-day pour. But, unlike the children in the books, Caroline and Freddy and little Priscilla had not received these treasures open-mouthed with pleasure, nor had they quietly and happily exercised their creative instinct, leaving their mother free to get on with her work. Perhaps her children hadn't as much of that instinct as other people's. At least, after a little listless fingering of colored paper Freddy turned away. "Say, Mother, I want to put on my brown suit," he said. Little did she dream then what the brown suit was to cost her. She answered casually, piling up the breakfast dishes,

<sup>1</sup> From *Fables for Parents* by Dorothy Canfield (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1937).

"I washed that suit yesterday, Freddy, and the rain came. So it's not dry yet."

He trotted back and forth after her as she stepped to and fro with the slightly nervous haste of a competent woman who has planned a busy morning. "But, Mother," he persisted, "I *want* to put it on. I *want* to." He raised his voice. "Mother, I want to put my brown suit on."

From the pantry where she had just discovered that the cream she had planned to use for the dessert was soured, she answered him with some asperity, "I told you it isn't dry yet!" But she reminded herself of the excellent rule, "Always make children understand the reasons for your refusals," and added, "It's hanging on the line on the side porch. Look out there, dear. You can see for yourself how wet it is."

He did as she bade him, and stood staring out, leaning his forehead on the glass.

Yet a little later as she stood before the telephone, grocery list in hand, he tugged at her skirt and as Central asked, "What number, please?" he said with plaintive obstinacy, "Mother, I *do* want to put on my brown suit."

She said with considerable warmth, "Somerset three six one. For heaven's sake, Freddy, that suit is *wet*. Is this Perkins and Larsen? How *could* you put it on! What price are your grapefruit today? Freddy, let go of my skirt. Grapefruit, I said. No, no— G for glory, r for run—"

But when she turned away from her struggle with the clerk, Freddy plucked at her hand and whimpered in the nasal fretting tone she had sworn (before she had children) no child of hers should ever use, "Mother I waa-a-nt to pu-u-t my brown—"

"*Don't whine*," she told him with a ferocity so swift and savage that he recoiled and was silent. She thought remorsefully, "Oh, dear, to scold is just as bad as to whine."

Going back into the pantry she recalled with resentment that the psychologists of family life say the moods of children are but the reflections of moods of the mother. She did not believe a word of it. "Did *I* start this?" she asked herself unanswerably, and, "How can anybody help being irritated when they're so perfectly unreasonable!"

But she was really a very good mother. She remembered that the basis of child-rearing is to understand each child at all times, and went resolutely back into the other room, determined to understand Freddy, if it were her last act. Disconcertingly, it was not Freddy, but Priscilla who ran to take her hand, who said pleadingly, timidly, as if appealing from the cruel decree of a tyrant, "Mummy, Fred *does* so want to have you let him wear his brown suit this morning!" The mother contained herself, collected the children—three-year-old Priscilla, five-year-old Fred, six-and-half-year-old Caroline—led them to the window and said, "Now, just look at that suit! How could I let Freddy wear anything that's as wet as sop?"

At least that was what she thought she said. What the children distinctly heard was, "You're in the wrong, wrong, wrong. And I am right, right, right, as I always am. There's no use your trying to get around that!"

They stared gloomily out at this idea rather than at the wet clothes. Their mother went on, "What in the world does Fred *want* to wear his brown suit for, anyhow? What's the matter with the suit he's got on?"

What the children heard was, "No matter what Freddy said his reason was, I'd soon show you it was all foolishness."

They attempted no answer, shaken as they were by wave after invisible wave of her impatience to be done with them and at something else. Indeed she was impatient. Why not, with her morning work all waiting to be done. She held her children for a moment with the bullying eye of a drill-

sergeant, and then said, challengingly, "*Well—?*" She meant, and they knew she meant, "I hope you realize that I have you beaten."

Something in Fred—it was something rather fine—exploded with a crash. His round face grew grim and black. He looked savagely at his mother, thrust out his lower jaw and, keeping his eyes ragingly on hers, kicked a footstool, viciously, as if he were kicking her.

"Fred-*dy*" she said in a voice meant to cow him. But he was not cowed. He kicked again with all his might, looking at his mother and hating her.

And then—he was only a little boy—he broke. His hard defiant face crumpled up into despair. He crooked his arm to hide his suffering from his mother,—from his mother!—and turned away to lean against the wall in the silent, dry, inexplicable misery which often ended what his mother called "Fred's tantrums." Little Priscilla began a whimpering. Caroline put her hands up to her face and hung her head.

Their mother thought, her nerves taut with exasperation, "I'd just like to see one of those child-specialists manage *my* children on a rainy day! They'd find out a thing or two!" But she loved her children. She loved them dearly. With her next breath she was ashamed of being angry with them. The tears came to her eyes and an aching lump into her throat. Bewildered, dismayed, she asked herself, in the purest surprise, "Why, how did we get into this dreadful state? What can the trouble be?"

She went back into the pantry, took a long breath, took a drink of water, tried to relax her muscles, cast her mind back to the book about what to do on a rainy day. But she could recall nothing else in it but that appeal to the creative instinct. She had tried that, and it had failed.

She heard the front door open. The voice of a young

cousin, no special favorite of hers—cried, “Ye gods and little fishes, what weather!” He slammed the door behind him. Although he was nineteen, he still slammed doors as if he were twelve. He had come as he sometimes did when it rained, to wait in the living room for the bus that took him to college. One of its stopping places was their corner.

Priscilla, the literal, asked, “What does ‘gods and little fishes’ mean?”

“Mean?” said the freshman, laughing and flinging his books and his rain-coat down on the floor. “What do you mean, mean? You mean too much, Prissy. What does this mean?” As she began to wash the dishes the mother could see that he had flung his heels in the air and was walking on his hands. “He’s too old for such foolishness,” she thought severely. And sure enough, out of the pockets of his adult suit of clothes, now upside down, little-boy junk rattled down around his hands. The children squealed and made a rush toward the bits of string, dirty handkerchiefs, knives, fishhooks, nails, pieces of cork, screws and pencils. “No you don’t!” said he, returning his feet to the floor with a bang. “Everything there is a part of an important enterprise.”

“What’s a ‘portant enter—” began Priscilla.

“Whatever I do,” he told her coolly, “were it only to make a mousetrap. If *I* made mousetraps there’d be a four-strip concrete road to my door in a week’s time, you bet. No mousetrap of mine would ever have let out Uncle Peter’s mouse, believe me.”

“What? Who? What’s Uncle Peter’s mouse?” clamored the children.

“Oh, surely you know that story. No child of our family gets brung up without hearing that one. No? Well, one morning when Uncle Peter and Aunt Molly came down to breakfast—Priscilla, do *not* ask who they were and where they lived, it’s no matter—they found a mouse in their trap.

It was the kind of trap that catches the mouse alive, so they got the cat, and they all went out on the porch to open the trap and let the cat catch the mouse. Priscilla, do *not* say this was horrid of them, it was, and I can't help it, but that was the way it happened, and it was so long ago probably they didn't know any better. So there they all were"—he illustrated how tensely they stood, stooping over an imaginary trap—"the two children and Uncle Peter and Aunt Molly. And the cat. She was scrooched right close in front of the cage"—he quivered and crouched with such vivacity of acting that the children began to laugh—"while Uncle Peter s-l-o-w-l-y, s-l-o-w-l-y lifted the door of the trap till it was open enough for the mouse to get out." He drew a long breath and made a dramatic pause. The children gazed at him, mouths open, eyes unwinking. "And then—" he sprang into the air, "the cat jumped!" He clutched at Fred. "Uncle Peter hollered!" He ran to Caroline and seized her arm. "The children yelled bloody murder!" He flung the children to right and left. "Aunt Molly shrieked!" He sank back on the floor. "But the mouse was gone!"

He gazed with enormous solemnity at his spell-bound listeners. "The cat was prowling around, sniffing and lashing her tail"—he sniffed the air and getting up on his hands and knees lashed an imaginary tail—"but—there—was—no—mouse."

He sat cross-legged and earnest and went on, "Well, Aunt Molly was terribly afraid of mice, and she always had the idea that all a mouse wanted to do was to run up folks' clothes, so she was sure the mouse had done that to one of them. So she took one child and then the other, shook them till their teeth nearly dropped out"—he shot out a long arm and seized Priscilla, Caroline, and Freddy one after the other, shaking them hard and setting them into giggling fits—"and put first one and then the other inside the

house and shut the door, quick! Then she shook herself hard. And she went into the house and shut the door. Then Uncle Peter shook *himself* hard. And went in quick and shut the door. And then they all had breakfast, wondering all the while about where that mouse could have gone to. And after they'd finished breakfast, Uncle Peter stood up to go to the office and took hold of the lower edge of his vest to pull it down"—he seized the lower edge of an imaginary vest vigorously and stood appalled, a frantic expression of horror on his face—"and *there was the mouse!*" The children shrieked. "It had been right under the edge of his vest and when he grabbed the vest he put his hand right around it, and when he took his hand away the mouse was in it, squirming." He showed them how it squirmed, and then, speeding up to express-train speed, finished the story all in one breath. "And he was so rattled he flung it right away without looking to see where, and it went spang into Aunt Molly's face and she fainted dead away—and the mouse beat it so quick they never did see it again."

He grinned down at the children, literally rolling on the floor, as pleased with the story as they. "Say, kids, what-d'you-say we act it out? Let's. Who'll be what? I'll be Uncle Peter. Priscilla, you be one of the children. Caroline, you be Aunt Molly—that's a swell part! You must yell your head off when I throw the mouse in your face. Fred, you be—"

"I'll be the cat," said Fred, scrambling to his feet.

So they acted out the little drama, throwing themselves passionately into their rôles, Caroline so magnificent with her scream and faint at the end that Priscilla said, "Oh, I want to be Aunt Molly."

"I'd kind o'like to be Uncle Peter," said Fred.

"Okay by me," said the student. "I'll be the cat."

By the time they had finished it again they were out of



breath, what with screaming and running and laughing and acting, and sank down together on the floor. Little by little their laughter subsided to a peaceful silence. Freddy sprawled half over the knobby knees of the tall boy, Priscilla was tucked away under his arm, Caroline leaned against him. From the pantry where, unheeded, the mother washed the dishes, she thought jealously, "What do they see in him? That story is nothing but nonsense." And then—she was really an intelligent person—it came over her, "Why, that is just what they like in it."

Out of the silence, almost as though she were thinking aloud, little Priscilla murmured, "Freddy was bad this morning." There was compassion in her tone.

"What was eating him?" asked the student, not particularly interested.

"He wanted to wear his brown suit. And it was wet, and he couldn't. So he kicked the footstool and was bad."

"What's the point about the brown suit, old man?"

The question was put in a matter-of-fact tone of comradely interest. But even so Fred hesitated, opened his mouth, shut it, said nothing.

It was Caroline who explained, "It's got a holster pocket at the back where he can carry his pretend pistol."

The mother in the pantry, astounded, remorseful, reproachful, cried out to herself, "Oh, why didn't he tell *me* that!" But she knew very well why he had not. She had plenty of brains.

"Oh, I see," said the student. "But why don't you sew a holster pocket on the pants you've got on, boy? On all your pants. It's nothing to sew on pockets. You girls, too. You might as well have holster pockets. When I was your age I had sewed on dozens of pockets." He took a long breath, and began to rattle off nonsense with an intensely serious face and machine-gun speed. "My goodness, by the

time I was fourteen I had sewed on five hundred and thirty-four pockets, and one small watch-pocket but I don't count that one. Didn't you ever hear how I put myself through college sewing on pockets? And when I was graduated, the President of Pocket Sewing Union of America sent for me, and—"

"But you've only just got in to college," Priscilla reminded him earnestly.

(In the pantry, her mother thought, with a stab of self-knowledge, "Why, is that *me*? Was I being literal, like that, about rainy-day occupations?")

"Priscilla," said the college student, sternly, "don't you know what happens to children who say 'go-up-bald-head' to their elders—oh, but—" He clutched his tousled hair, and said, imitating Priscilla's serious little voice, "Oh, but I'm not bald yet, am I?"

A horn sounded in the street. He sprang up, tumbling the children roughly from him, snatched his books. "There's my bus." The door slammed.

The children came running to find their mother. "Oh, Mother, Mother, can we have some cloth to make pockets out of?"

She was ready for them. "I've got lots of it that'll be just right," she said, telling herself wryly, "I can get an idea all right if somebody'll push it half way down my throat."

But for the rest of the morning, as the children sat happily exercising their creative instinct by sewing on queer pockets in queer places on their clothes, she was thinking with sorrow, "It's not fair. That great lout of a boy without a care in the world takes their fancy with his nonsense, and they turn their backs on me entirely. I represent only food and care—and refusals. I work my head off for them—and the first stranger appeals to them more."

Yet after lunch they put their three heads together and whispered and giggled, and "had a secret." Then, Caroline at their head, they trotted over to the sofa where their mother had dropped down to rest. "Mother," said Caroline in her little-girl bird-voice, "wouldn't you like to play Uncle-Peter-and-Aunt-Molly-and-the-mouse? You didn't have a single chance to this morning—not once—you were working so." They looked at her with fond shining eyes of sympathy. "Come on, Mother! You'll love it!" they encouraged her.

A lump came into her throat again—a good lump this time. She swallowed. "Oh, thanks, children. I know I'd like to. What part are you going to have me take?"

The secret came out then. They let Freddy tell her, for it had been his inspiration. He looked proudly at his mother and offered her his best. "Ye gods and little fishes! We're going to let you be the *mouse*!"

She clasped her hands. "Oh, children!" she cried.

From their pride in having pleased her, a gust of love-madness blew across them, setting them to fall upon their mother like soft-pawed kittens wild with play, pushing her back on the pillows, hugging her, worrying her, rumpling her hair, kissing her ears, her nose, whatever they could reach.

But Priscilla was not sure they had been clear. She drew away. "You don't have to get caught, you know," she reassured her mother earnestly. "The mouse wasn't caught—never!"



## WIFE OF THE HERO <sup>1</sup>

BY SALLY BENSON

*She began to wish, for the first time, that Joe was different, that he dressed a little better, that his manner was not quite so brusque. . . . She thought of her father and supposed that Joe would despise a man like her father, despise him for his golf and his detective stories. She tried to picture Joe and her father sitting together on the porch of the country club. Joe would be quiet and polite in a frozen sort of way, sitting there in his blue suit, his good one, and her father, after a few hearty attempts to talk to him, would give up and dismiss him as being queerer than Dick's hat-band.*

### I

THE trouble was, Libby told herself, she had talked too much about him to her family, and now they were curious, quite naturally, and wanted to see him. But there had been so much to explain about him; why he never came out to Pelham to see her, not even on Sundays; why she had met him in town for dinner, and then took the train home by herself afterwards. Her mother thought this all very odd, so Libby had tried to explain him and, as her own thoughts were so vague and excited, she had made a separate picture

<sup>1</sup> From *People Are Fascinating* by Sally Benson (New York, Covici-Friede, Inc., 1936).

of him for her mother and father and Jeanie that wasn't true at all. But the picture suited them, as she knew it would, because it was a picture with which they were familiar.

She had made him exceptionally fine for Jeanie who was seventeen and still expected the finest.

"What's he like?" Jeanie had asked.

"What's *who* like?"

"Oh, this Mr. X. that you keep seeing and that you're so mysterious about."

"Well," Libby had said as a picture of him that would suit Jeanie began to form in her mind, "he's not like anybody you ever saw, exactly. He's—well—he's simply swell."

"I know. But what's he *like*?" Jeanie had asked again. "Is he like Gene Raymond, or Clark Gable, or who?"

Jeanie was very definite about people. They had to look like somebody or almost like somebody. Somebody handsome, or famous, or interesting. Men, to Jeanie, who couldn't be classified as, "He's sort of like Dick Powell," or "He's Bing Crosby's double," just didn't exist. Even though, for a while, during the early part of the summer, she had devoted a few evenings to a young man who wore glasses and had no redeeming features that the family could see. But Jeanie had insisted that he danced like Fred Astaire and, as the floor of the country club was always so crowded that you couldn't tell how anyone was dancing, no one had been able to prove she was wrong.

So Libby told her, "Well, you see, he's studying to be a doctor. Not a doctor, exactly, though. He's going to do all sorts of work with microbes and things. Like Arrowsmith."

"Oh." Jeanie had exclaimed, terribly impressed. "You're lucky. Someone like Ronald Colman around all the time! Libby, you've *got* to marry him and go to the tropics and everything. Not that I want *you* to die like the girl in *Arrow-*

*smith*, but think how grand it would be to live down there in those funny places and have your husband be like a sort of god to those people. And I can visit you and, maybe, meet someone like him myself. Libby, you can be a hero's wife! I bet you never thought you'd be a hero's wife!"

Libby thought of Arrowsmith, too, and of Arrowsmith's wife in the movies being brave and waiting for him, to the accompaniment of the kind of music that did things to you and lifted you up to places that were spacious and light.

Then Jeanie had said, "Of course, he's grand-looking and everything, too, isn't he, Libby? I mean, he's not one of those funny little men you see with brief cases?"

And Libby had denied this emphatically, although for a moment her heart had sunk. But she was in a haze, those days, and as long as she could keep her inner picture of Joe intact, she was willing to present him to her world in any way that would please them. He was too short, she knew, and when she walked with him she bent her knees a little so that never, by any possible chance, would he be aware of it. As to whether or not he was good-looking, she couldn't have honestly said. From the moment she had been introduced to him on a Fifth Avenue bus by Marjory Scott, a rather dreadful girl she had gone to school with, she had had such a feeling of excitement about him that it was as though he were out of focus in her sight. Marjory Scott had got off the bus and Libby had sat with him all the way to Forty-second Street, and then he had walked over to Grand Central with her. Riding back to Pelham, it seemed to her that she had never said so much to anyone in so short a time, although later when she tried to piece together what she had said, it didn't sound so unusual. And when he had asked her to have dinner with him the next night, his invitation and her acceptance had seemed weighted with a sort of insistence.

After that, everything between them had been wonder-

ful; the little place they went for dinner; the talks they had; and the things he told her about himself. His whole life, as he told it, became Romance for Libby; about how hard he had worked, about his father's poor little farm in Indiana, about running away from home, about working his way through an obscure little college, and not even belonging to a fraternity. He couldn't drive a car, he said, he'd never owned one, nor did he play any games because he hadn't had time for them. She thought of him as some sort of bright light that had found its way up from depths of darkness she didn't know existed. She was terribly in love with him and she became fiercely partisan for him in hundreds of small, absurd ways. She began to despise the boys she knew at home because they had everything and thought nothing of it—the tanned young men who drove up to her house in cars and blew the horns peremptorily, to see if she were home. She felt that she, herself, was too comfortable, and she became aware of money and of how much things cost, and she began to ask for very little and to be ashamed of extravagances. She wouldn't let Joe ride home on the train with her, the fare was too much, and at dinner she said she wasn't hungry and ordered the cheapest thing on the menu. At night she lay awake thinking, and sometimes, when she thought of the things he had told her, she cried.

She was like a stone wall between him and her family. She was careful to give them no cause to be amused at anything about him. And to do this, she had lied desperately. She had told Jeanie that he was a Princeton man of a year before the time of any of Jeanie's young men; she told her mother that he lived in a sort of studio near Grammercy Park, because she knew that One Hundred and Seventy-eighth Street was beyond her mother's comprehension; she told her father that she couldn't possibly ask him out for golf on Sundays because he was taking all sorts of summer classes and was

studying terribly hard. She said that his father was dead, which was true, but that he had been a mining engineer some place out West; she said that the reason she met him in town always was because he knew so many interesting people and that it was such fun to sit around and really talk instead of chasing around to night clubs and roof gardens dancing. She won Jeanie over to him completely; her father said that he sounded like an up and coming young man; but her mother was still uneasy and unconvinced.

## II

As for herself, Libby was strong in her feeling that she had discovered something that would never come to her again in her lifetime. But it was a feeling she couldn't expose to anyone else just yet. So for over six weeks she battled for Joe with lies to her family, and then the terrible moment came. She had known all along that it was coming, but she had hoped for more time.

It happened one evening just as she was leaving the house to catch the train for New York, where he was to meet her for dinner. As she passed the door to the living room, she knew instantly that her mother and father had been talking about her, and she wished there was some way that she could be out of the house and on her way to the station before her mother called her. But there wasn't.

"Libby," her mother said. "Come here. I want to speak to you a minute."

"I'm late," she answered. "I'll miss my train."

"You have a few minutes," her mother said. "I won't keep you long, Libby. Your father and I have been talking about this young man you keep meeting in New York. And we both feel, your father and I, that you should ask him to the house so that we can meet him. I don't like the idea of your being



constantly in the company of a young man we've never seen. I don't doubt he is all you say he is, but you're young and your judgments aren't formed yet, and I really must insist you ask him here. This Sunday."

"But, mother," she said, "I told you. It's awfully hard for him to get away. He's terribly busy and everything. I explained all that."

"Libby," her mother said, "you are talking like a foolish child. No young man is so busy that he can't spare a few hours to come this short way to meet your parents. I don't like it, I tell you. I don't like it at all. And if you won't ask him, then I must forbid your meeting him in New York."

"Oh, mother, please!" she begged. But she knew it was no use.

Usually on the train she sat in a happy daze, a queer feeling of anticipation in the pit of her stomach that got better as the train went into the tunnel after it passed One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. But this evening she was miserable with the sensation that she was facing something she was powerless to handle. She began to wish, for the first time, that Joe was different, that he dressed a little better, that his manner was not quite so brusque, that he wasn't always so terribly on the defensive, that his indignation over things was more subdued. She thought of her father, and supposed that Joe would despise a man like her father, despise him for his golf and his detective stories. And she tried to picture Joe and her father sitting on the porch of the country club having a drink together and talking. Joe would be quiet and polite in a frozen sort of way, sitting there in his blue suit, his good one, and her father, after a few hearty attempts to talk to him in the manner he always used toward young men, would give up and dismiss him as being queerer than Dick's hatband.

What would Jeanie say when she saw him? She would be-

gin to talk a lot and hand him her line. She would overwhelm him with her silliest talk to cover her own confusion. Afterwards, she would be lovely to Libby about him, saying, "He's terribly nice. Really he is. He must be awfully bright." But. . .

Her family would be too polite to question him much, but Jeanie was sure to ask him about Princeton, and one by one the lies she had told about him would be exposed. If she could only look ahead and be sure of his greatness! How did women like Leora Arrowsmith and Margaret Clive *know* that their husbands were going to be great men? Did they just love them, not caring? Did they have to explain them to their families? She felt she would like to be insured against humiliation and defeat. But how could she say to Joe, "Look, I will love you and marry you and be faithful to you, if you will guarantee me greatness and immortality. I will stand funny little restaurants, dreary apartments, and clothes that aren't right, if you will promise me that some day I will be pictured against a great background with the sound of a symphony orchestra."

### III

He was waiting for her in the restaurant and when she saw him sitting at their table in the corner, she saw him for an instant through Jeanie's eyes. "That funny looking little man!" and she felt a rush of indignation toward him.

Then, "Hello," she said.

He only half rose, she noticed, and he made no effort to help her with her coat. Perversely, she made a chore of slipping out of its full sleeves and arranging it on the back of her chair. Then she looked around the little restaurant, at the corrugated tin ceiling, at the pink paper roses on a trellis by the window, at the tiled floor, and her glance stripped the place of glamour. She wondered what her

mother would say if she could see it, her mother who always stopped at the Plaza and who understood that sometimes whimsical young people ate at Schrafft's.

"How are all the Pelham ladies today in their hats and their pastel shades?" he asked.

It was the worst thing he could have said.

"They look all right," she answered, defensively. "What's the matter with them?"

He looked at the menu and then, curiously, across the table at her. She looked back at him steadily and let her gaze fall to his hands and to his nails that were too short and looked as though he bit them.

"Some of them are sweet," she said.

It seemed to her that he decided with almost indecent interest what he was going to eat. He was always hungry, too hungry, and she resented feeling that perhaps these dinners with her were the best ones he knew. She suddenly thought of the way he had of pushing his plate back when he had finished eating.

"It was perfect in the country today," she told him. "I very nearly called you to tell you I wouldn't be in."

"Oh," he said. "Why didn't you?"

"Well, it wasn't *vital*. It was just that it was so heavenly, and I knew New York would be hot and sticky and dreadful. *You* know."

"It would have been all right," he said, "if you didn't want to come in."

"Don't be silly," she said. "We all went to Rye for a swim, and Douglas Collins was there. I haven't seen him in ages. He was all scratched up. He'd smashed his car, and he was terribly funny about it. He's perfectly crazy. He doesn't care about anything."

She shook her head amusedly over Douglas Collins. Across the table beside Joe's water glass, she noticed an en-

velope stuffed with papers and she knew that he had brought something to show her.

"Did I ever tell you about the time we all went to Coney Island all the way from Pelham in a taxi? I don't know what made us, except that it seemed like a good idea at the time. Anyway, we took this terrible old cab and the driver's name was Cecil something. Imagine a taxi driver being named Cecil! None of the windows would open and Douglas put his hand through one and smashed the glass. It was funny."

Joe's head was bent too close to his plate as he ate. "Why can't he talk to me?" she thought indignantly. "Why can't he talk in just a silly sort of way? He's waiting for me to be quiet so he can begin telling me about himself again."

She gave a suppressed little yawn. "Do you know, I think I'm *sleepy*! Or maybe it's because this place is hot. I was telling Jeanie about this place and she *adored* it. Once this boy took Jeanie just for fun to a little Rumanian place on Second Avenue and she was thrilled!" She nodded toward the trellis. "I told her about the roses," she said. And laughed.

"Did you tell her about me?"

"Oh," she said. "Jeanie loves hearing about you. You fascinate her."

She pushed her food about the plate with her fork. It was a veal cutlet covered thickly with tomato sauce. "I'm not hungry," she told him. "I don't know how you can eat in this weather."

"I didn't have any lunch," he said.

"We ate on the beach. A lot of terrible things."

"Look, Libby," Joe said. "I want to tell you something. I have a chance to do some tutoring. This fellow is no darned good, but his old man is dead set on having him be a doctor, and I thought I'd talk it over with you and see if you minded."

"See if I *minded*?" she repeated. "Why should I mind?"

I mean, if you can get this job, I suppose you have to."

"Well, you see, I'll be tutoring in the evenings mostly. I won't be able to see you much."

"Life is real, life is earnest," she said. She leaned back in her chair and looked at him. "I used to have a funny teacher. And every time I did anything half-way decent, he used to say it was very commendable. So I think what you're going to do is very commendable."

She took a sip of her water, but the water was warm and the glass felt greasy. "Now then," she said. "Tell me about it."

But he was silent for so long that she began to talk again and her voice sounded unpleasant to her. "Jeanie and I have been devilin' mother to take us somewhere. Of course, we're having loads of fun, but I think every once in a while anybody's apt to get restless. We thought it would be fun to just get in the car and start off somewhere. Maybe Canada or some place like that."

It seemed to her that she talked on and on. She told him about the youngest Owen boy getting tight at the Club and waking up the next morning on the fifth tee; she told him about the Harrises who had only been married four months and were getting a divorce, and that "Nina Harris is no fool, though, she's going to ask for plenty of alimony and she'll get it, too"; she told him about middle-aged Harvey Lyon who had simply walked out on his wife, but "you couldn't blame him much. She was this perfect *mouse*, and he'd stood her for fifteen years"; she told him that the Marsdens had had another baby and "weren't they foolish? Because they're posted at the club even"; she told him that Jeanie didn't want to go back to the same school and had threatened to get herself kicked out if her mother made her go. Her talk was a cruel caricature of the sort of talk she had heard all her life.

But it gave her a queer sense of exhilaration and for a while she enjoyed listening to herself and watching Joe's face. She remembered a book she had read once about a woman who had deliberately disillusioned the man she was in love with for his own good, and it made her feel hard and unnatural.

## IV

Outside the restaurant, standing in the street, Joe asked, "What would you like to do? Would you like to see a movie or something?"

It was the first time he had suggested doing anything. Usually, they sat and talked, or, rather, he talked and she listened until it was time for her train to leave. There was something about his asking her what she wanted to do that made her collapse completely. "I don't know," she said. "I think I'm tired. I think I want to go home."

They started walking toward the subway. "Joe," she asked, "may we take a taxi?"

In the taxi, they sat far apart, Joe, with his face set, looking out the window. If he would only, she thought, take my hand or kiss me now, everything would be all right. I could tell him then. I could tell him what I've done.

At the station, after he paid the driver, she touched his arm. "Joe," she said, "don't come any farther with me. I'm going to get a magazine or something. And I want to call up this girl I know. I promised her I would."

He stood there looking miserably at her. "Libby," he asked. "What's the matter?"

She looked back at him brightly. "Why, nothing," she told him, her voice surprised and puzzled.

"Well, I'll telephone you. Shall I?"

But she could only keep on looking at him brightly, and touch his hand before she walked away. Once, going down

the steps, she almost turned and ran back, but she hurried on until she was seated in the train and it was too late. It was quite a while before the train pulled out, and she sat there in the dark hot station wanting to cry.

I've done something terrible, she thought. What kind of a girl am I? What will ever happen to me now? Nothing fine can ever happen to me now. How are heroes' wives made?



## THE FAT OF THE LAND <sup>1</sup>

BY ANZIA YEZIERSKA

*"My children give me everything from the best . . . but I can't talk myself out in their language. They want to make me over for an American lady, and I'm different."*

IN an air-shaft so narrow that you could touch the next wall with your bare hands, Hanneh Breineh leaned out and knocked on her neighbor's window.

"Can you loan me your wash-boiler for the clothes?" she called.

Mrs. Pelz threw up the sash.

"The boiler? What's the matter with yours again? Didn't you tell me you had it fixed already last week?"

"A black year on him, the robber, the way he fixed it! If you have no luck in this world, then it's better not to live. There I spent out fifteen cents to stop up one hole, and it runs out another. How I ate out my gall bargaining with him he should let it down to fifteen cents! He wanted yet a quarter, the swindler. Gottuniu! My bitter heart on him for every penny he took from me for nothing!"

"You got to watch all those swindlers, or they'll steal the whites out of your eyes," admonished Mrs. Pelz. "You should have tried out your boiler before you paid him. Wait a minute till I empty out my dirty clothes in a pillow-case; then I'll hand it to you."

<sup>1</sup> From *Hungry Hearts* by Anzia Yezierska (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., The Riverside Press, 1920).



Mrs. Pelz returned with the boiler and tried to hand it across to Hanneh Breineh, but the soap-box refrigerator on the window-sill was in the way.

"You got to come in for the boiler yourself," said Mrs. Pelz.

"Wait only till I tie my Sammy on to the high-chair he shouldn't fall on me again. He's so wild that ropes won't hold him."

Hanneh Breineh tied the child in the chair, stuck a pacifier in his mouth, and went in to her neighbor. As she took the boiler Mrs. Pelz said:

"Do you know Mrs. Melker ordered fifty pounds of chicken for her daughter's wedding? And such grand chickens! Shining like gold! My heart melted in me just looking at the flowing fatness of those chickens."

Hanneh Breineh smacked her thin, dry lips, a hungry gleam in her sunken eyes.

"Fifty pounds!" she gasped. "It ain't possible. How do you know?"

"I heard her with my own ears. I saw them with my own eyes. And she said she will chop up the chicken livers with onions and eggs for an appetizer, and then she will buy twenty-five pounds of fish, and cook it sweet and sour with raisins, and she said she will bake all her shtrudels on pure chicken fat."

"Some people work themselves up in the world," sighed Hanneh Breineh. "For them is America flowing with milk and honey. In Savel Mrs. Melker used to get shriveled up from hunger. She and her children used to live on potato-peelings and crusts of dry bread picked out from the barrels; and in America she lives to eat chicken, and apple shtrudels soaking in fat."

"The world is a wheel always turning," philosophized Mrs. Pelz. "Those who were high go down low, and those

who've been low go up higher. Who will believe me here in America that in Poland I was a cook in a banker's house? I handled ducks and geese every day. I used to bake coffee-cake with cream so thick you could cut it with a knife."

"And do you think I was a nobody in Poland?" broke in Hanneh Breineh, tears welling in her eyes as the memories of her past rushed over her. "But what's the use of talking? In America money is everything. Who cares who my father or grandfather was in Poland? Without money I'm a living dead one. My head dries out worrying how to get for the children the eating a penny cheaper."

Mrs. Pelz wagged her head, a gnawing envy contracting her features.

"Mrs. Melker had it good from the day she came," she said, begrudgingly. "Right away she sent all her children to the factory, and she began to cook meat for dinner every day. She and her children have eggs and buttered rolls for breakfast each morning like millionaires."

A sudden fall and a baby's scream, and the boiler dropped from Hanneh Breineh's hands as she rushed into her kitchen, Mrs. Pelz after her. They found the high-chair turned on top of the baby.

"Gewalt! Save me! Run for a doctor!" cried Hanneh Breineh, as she dragged the child from under the high-chair. "He's killed! He's killed! My only child! My precious lamb!" she shrieked as she ran back and forth with the screaming infant.

Mrs. Pelz snatched little Sammy from the mother's hands.

"Meshugneh! What are you running around like a crazy, frightening the child? Let me see. Let me tend to him. He ain't killed yet." She hastened to the sink to wash the child's face, and discovered a swelling lump on his forehead. "Have you a quarter in your house?" she asked.

"Yes, I got one," replied Hanneh Breineh, climbing on

a chair. "I got to keep it on a high shelf where the children can't get it."

Mrs. Pelz seized the quarter Hanneh Breineh handed down to her.

"Now pull your left eyelid three times while I'm pressing the quarter, and you'll see the swelling go down."

Hanneh Breineh took the child again in her arms, shaking and cooing over it and caressing it.

"Ah-ah-ah, Sammy! Ah-ah-ah-ah, little lamb! Ah-ah-ah, little bird! Ah-ah-ah-ah, precious heart! Oh, you saved my life; I thought he was killed," gasped Hanneh Breineh, turning to Mrs. Pelz. "Oi-i!" she sighed, "a mother's heart! Always in fear over her children. The minute anything happens to them all life goes out of me. I lose my head and I don't know where I am any more."

"No wonder the child fell," admonished Mrs. Pelz. "You should have a red ribbon or red beads on his neck to keep away the evil eye. Wait. I got something in my machine-drawer."

Mrs. Pelz returned, bringing the boiler and a red string, which she tied about the child's neck while the mother proceeded to fill the boiler.

A little later Hanneh Breineh again came into Mrs. Pelz's kitchen, holding Sammy in one arm and in the other an apronful of potatoes. Putting the child down on the floor, she seated herself on the unmade kitchen-bed and began to peel the potatoes in her apron.

"Woe to me!" sobbed Hanneh Breineh. "To my bitter luck there ain't no end. With all my other troubles, the stove got broke. I lighted the fire to boil the clothes, and it's to get choked with smoke. I paid rent only a week ago, and the agent don't want to fix it. A thunder should strike him! He only comes for the rent, and if anything has to be fixed, then he don't want to hear nothing."

"Why comes it to me so hard?" went on Hanneh Breineh, the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I can't stand it no more. I came into you for a minute to run away from my troubles. It's only when I sit myself down to peel potatoes or nurse the baby that I take time to draw a breath, and beg only for death."

Mrs. Pelz, accustomed to Hanneh Breineh's bitter outbursts, continued her scrubbing.

"Ut!" exclaimed Hanneh Breineh, irritated at her neighbor's silence, "what are you tearing up the world with your cleaning? What's the use to clean up when everything only gets dirty again?"

"I got to shine up my house for the holidays."

"You've got it so good nothing lays on your mind but to clean your house. Look on this little blood-sucker," said Hanneh Breineh, pointing to the wizened child, made prematurely solemn from starvation and neglect. "Could anybody keep that brat clean? I wash him one minute, and he is dirty the minute after." Little Sammy grew frightened and began to cry. "Shut up!" ordered the mother, picking up the child to nurse it again. "Can't you see me take a rest for a minute?"

The hungry child began to cry at the top of its weakened lungs.

"Na, na, you glutton." Hanneh Breineh took out a dirty pacifier from her pocket and stuffed it into the baby's mouth. The grave, pasty-faced infant shrank into a panic of fear, and chewed the nipple nervously, clinging to it with both his thin little hands.

"For what did I need yet the sixth one?" groaned Hanneh Breineh, turning to Mrs. Pelz. "Wasn't it enough five mouths to feed? If I didn't have this child on my neck, I could turn myself around and earn a few cents." She wrung

her hands in a passion of despair. "Gottuniu! The earth should only take it before it grows up!"

"Shah! Shah!" reproved Mrs. Pelz. "Pity yourself on the child. Let it grow up already so long as it is here. See how frightened it looks on you." Mrs. Pelz took the child in her arms and petted it. "The poor little lamb! What did it done you should hate it so?"

Hanneh Breineh pushed Mrs. Pelz away from her.

"To whom can I open the wounds of my heart?" she moaned. "Nobody has pity on me. You don't believe me, nobody believes me until I'll fall down like a horse in the middle of the street. Oi weh! Mine life is so black for my eyes! Some mothers got luck. A child gets run over by a car, some fall from a window, some burn themselves up with a match, some get choked with diphtheria; but no death takes mine away."

"God from the world, stop cursing!" admonished Mrs. Pelz. "What do you want from the poor children? Is it their fault that their father makes small wages? Why do you let it all out on them?" Mrs. Pelz sat down beside Hanneh Breineh. "Wait only till your children get old enough to go to the shop and earn money," she consoled. "Push only through those few years while they are yet small; your sun will begin to shine; you will live on the fat of the land, when they begin to bring you in the wages each week."

Hanneh Breineh refused to be comforted.

"Till they are old enough to go to the shop and earn money they'll eat the head off my bones," she wailed. "If you only knew the fights I got by each meal. Maybe I gave Abe a bigger piece of bread than Fanny. Maybe Fanny got a little more soup in her plate than Jake. Eating is dearer than diamonds. Potatoes went up a cent on a pound, and milk is only for millionaires. And once a week, when I buy

a little meat for the Sabbath, the butcher weighs it for me like gold, with all the bones in it. When I come to lay the meat out on a plate and divide it up, there ain't nothing to it but bones. Before, he used to throw me in a piece of fat extra or a piece of lung, but now you got to pay for everything, even for a bone to the soup."

"Never mind; you'll yet come out from all your troubles. Just as soon as your children get old enough to get their working papers the more children you got, the more money you'll have."

"Why should I fool myself with the false shine of hope? Don't I know it's already my black luck not to have it good in this world? Do you think American children will right away give everything they earn to their mother?"

"I know what is with you the matter," said Mrs. Pelz. "You didn't eat yet to-day. When it is empty in the stomach, the whole world looks black. Come, only let me give you something good to taste in the mouth; that will freshen you up." Mrs. Pelz went to the cupboard and brought out the saucepan of gefülte fish that she had cooked for dinner and placed it on the table in front of Hanneh Breineh. "Give a taste my fish," she said, taking one slice on a spoon, and handing it to Hanneh Breineh with a piece of bread. "I wouldn't give it to you on a plate because I just cleaned up my house, and I don't want to dirty up more dishes."

"What, am I a stranger you should have to serve me on a plate yet!" cried Hanneh Breineh, snatching the fish in her trembling fingers.

"Oi weh! How it melts through all the bones!" she exclaimed, brightening as she ate. "May it be for good luck to us all!" she exulted, waving aloft the last precious bite.

Mrs. Pelz was so flattered that she even ladled up a spoonful of gravy.

"There is a bit of onion and carrot in it," she said, as she handed it to her neighbor.

Hanneh Breineh sipped the gravy drop by drop, like a connoisseur sipping wine.

"Ah-h-h! A taste of that gravy lifts me up to heaven!" As she disposed leisurely of the slice of onion and carrot she relaxed and expanded and even grew jovial. "Let us wish all our troubles on the Russian Czar! Let him burst with our worries for rent! Let him get shriveled with our hunger for bread! Let his eyes dry out of his head looking for work!

"Shah! I'm forgetting from everything," she exclaimed, jumping up. "It must be eleven or soon twelve, and my children will be right away out of school and fall on me like a pack of wild wolves. I better quick run to the market and see what cheaper I can get for a quarter."

Because of the lateness of her coming, the stale bread at the nearest bakeshop was sold out, and Hanneh Breineh had to trudge from shop to shop in search of the usual bargain, and spent nearly an hour to save two cents.

In the meantime the children returned from school, and, finding the door locked, climbed through the fire-escape, and entered the house through the window. Seeing nothing on the table, they rushed to the stove. Abe pulled a steaming potato out of the boiling pot, and so scalded his fingers that the potato fell to the floor; whereupon the three others pounced on it.

"It was my potato," cried Abe, blowing his burned fingers, while with the other hand and his foot he cuffed and kicked the three who were struggling on the floor. A wild fight ensued, and the potato was smashed under Abe's foot amid shouts and screams. Hanneh Breineh, on the stairs, heard the noise of her famished brood, and topped their cries with curses and invectives.

"They are here already, the savages! They are here already to shorten my life! They heard you all over the hall, in all the houses around!"

The children, disregarding her words, pounced on her market-basket, shouting ravenously: "Mamma, I'm hungry! What more do you got to eat?"

They tore the bread and herring out of Hanneh Breineh's basket and devoured it in starved savagery, clamoring for more.

"Murderers!" screamed Hanneh Breineh, goaded beyond endurance. "What are you tearing from me my flesh? From where should I steal to give you more? Here I had already a pot of potatoes and a whole loaf of bread and two herrings, and you swallowed it down in the wink of an eye. I have to have Rockefeller's millions to fill your stomachs."

All at once Hanneh Breineh became aware that Benny was missing. "Oi wehl!" she burst out, wringing her hands in a new wave of woe, "where is Benny? Didn't he come home yet from school?"

She ran out into the hall, opened the grime-coated window, and looked up and down the street; but Benny was nowhere in sight.

"Abe, Jake, Fanny, quick, find Benny!" entreated Hanneh Breineh, as she rushed back into the kitchen. But the children, anxious to snatch a few minutes' play before the school-call, dodged past her and hurried out.

With the baby on her arm, Hanneh Breineh hastened to the kindergarten.

"Why are you keeping Benny here so long?" she shouted at the teacher as she flung open the door. "If you had my bitter heart, you would send him home long ago and not wait till I got to come for him."

The teacher turned calmly and consulted her record-cards.



"Benny Safron? He wasn't present this morning."

"Not here?" shrieked Hanneh Breineh. "I pushed him out myself he should go. The children didn't want to take him, and I had no time. Woe is me! Where is my child?" She began pulling her hair and beating her breast as she ran into the street.

Mrs. Pelz was busy at the pushcart, picking over some spotted apples, when she heard the clamor of an approaching crowd. A block off she recognized Hanneh Breineh, her hair disheveled, her clothes awry, running toward her with her yelling baby in her arms, the crowd following.

"Friend mine," cried Hanneh Breineh, falling on Mrs. Pelz's neck, "I lost my Benny, the best child of all my children." Tears streamed down her red, swollen eyes as she sobbed. "Benny! mine heart, mine life! Oi-i-il"

Mrs. Pelz took the frightened baby out of the mother's arms.

"Still yourself a little! See how you're frightening your child."

"Woe to me! Where is my Benny? Maybe he's killed already by a car. Maybe he fainted away from hunger. He didn't eat nothing all day long. Gottuniu! Pity yourself on me!"

She lifted her hands full of tragic entreaty.

"People, my child! Get me my child! I'll go crazy out of my head! Get me my child, or I'll take poison before your eyes!"

"Still yourself a little!" pleaded Mrs. Pelz.

"Talk not to me!" cried Hanneh Breineh, wringing her hands. "You're having all your children. I lost mine. Every good luck comes to other people. But I didn't live yet to see a good day in my life. Mine only joy, mine Benny, is lost away from me."

The crowd followed Hanneh Breineh as she wailed through the streets, leaning on Mrs. Pelz. By the time she

returned to her house the children were back from school; but seeing that Benny was not there, she chased them out in the street, crying:

"Out of here, you robbers, gluttons! Go find Benny!" Hanneh Breineh crumpled into a chair in utter prostration. "Oi weh! He's lost! Mine life; my little bird; mine only joy! How many nights I spent nursing him when he had the measles! And all that I suffered for weeks and months when he had the whooping-cough! How the eyes went out of my head till I learned him how to walk, till I learned him how to talk! And such a smart child! If I lost all the others, it wouldn't tear me so by the heart."

She worked herself up into such a hysteria, crying, and tearing her hair, and hitting her head with her knuckles, that at last she fell into a faint. It took some time before Mrs. Pelz, with the aid of neighbors, revived her.

"Benny, mine angel!" she moaned as she opened her eyes.

Just then a policeman came in with the lost Benny.

"Na, na, here you got him already!" said Mrs. Pelz. "Why did you carry on so for nothing? Why did you tear up the world like a crazy?"

The child's face was streaked with tears as he cowered, frightened and forlorn. Hanneh Breineh sprang toward him, slapping his cheeks, boxing his ears, before the neighbors could rescue him from her.

"Woe on your head!" cried the mother. "Where did you lost yourself? Ain't I got enough worries on my head than to go around looking for you? I didn't have yet a minute's peace from that child since he was born!"

"See a crazy mother!" remonstrated Mrs. Pelz, rescuing Benny from another beating. "Such a mouth! With one breath she blesses him when he is lost, and with the other breath she curses him when he is found."

Hanneh Breineh took from the window-sill a piece of

herring covered with swarming flies, and putting it on a slice of dry bread, she filled a cup of tea that had been stewing all day, and dragged Benny over to the table to eat.

But the child, choking with tears, was unable to touch the food.

"Go eat!" commanded Hanneh Breineh. "Eat and choke yourself eating!"

"Maybe she won't remember me no more. Maybe the servant won't let me in," thought Mrs. Pelz, as she walked by the brownstone house on Eighty-fourth Street where she had been told Hanneh Breineh now lived. At last she summoned up enough courage to climb the steps. She was all out of breath as she rang the bell with trembling fingers. 'Oi weh? Even the outside smells riches and plenty! Such curtains! And shades on all windows like by millionaires! Twenty years ago she used to eat from the pot to the hand, and now she lives in such a palace."

A whiff of steam-heated warmth swept over Mrs. Pelz as the door opened, and she saw her old friend of the tenements dressed in silk and diamonds like a being from another world.

"Mrs. Pelz, is it you!" cried Hanneh Breineh, overjoyed at the sight of her former neighbor. "Come right in. Since when are you back in New York?"

"We came last week," mumbled Mrs. Pelz, as she was led into a richly carpeted reception-room.

"Make yourself comfortable. Take off your shawl," urged Hanneh Breineh.

But Mrs. Pelz only drew her shawl more tightly around her, a keen sense of her poverty gripping her as she gazed, abashed by the luxurious wealth that shone from every corner.

"This shawl covers up my rags," she said, trying to hide her shabby sweater.

"I'll tell you what; come right into the kitchen," suggested Hanneh Breineh. "The servant is away for this afternoon, and we can feel more comfortable there. I can breathe like a free person in my kitchen when the girl has her day out."

Mrs. Pelz glanced about her in an excited daze. Never in her life had she seen anything so wonderful as a white-tiled kitchen, with its glistening porcelain sink and the aluminum pots and pans that shone like silver.

"Where are you staying now?" asked Hanneh Breineh, as she pinned an apron over her silk dress.

"I moved back to Delancey Street, where we used to live," replied Mrs. Pelz, as she seated herself cautiously in a white enameled chair.

"Oi weh! What grand times we had in that old house when we were neighbors!" sighed Hanneh Breineh, looking at her old friend with misty eyes.

"You still think on Delancey Street? Haven't you more high-class neighbors uptown here?"

"A good neighbor is not to be found every day," deplored Hanneh Breineh. "Uptown here, where each lives in his own house, nobody cares if the person next door is dying or going crazy from loneliness. It ain't anything like we used to have it in Delancey Street, when we could walk into one another's rooms without knocking, and borrow a pinch of salt or a pot to cook in."

Hanneh Breineh went over to the pantry-shelf.

"We are going to have a bite right here on the kitchen-table like on Delancey Street. So long there's no servant to watch us we can eat what we please."

"Oi! How it waters my mouth with appetite, the smell of

the herring and onion!" chuckled Mrs. Pelz, sniffing the welcome odors with greedy pleasure.

Hanneh Breineh pulled a dish-towel from the rack and threw one end of it to Mrs. Pelz.

"So long there's no servant around, we can use it together for a napkin. It's dirty, anyhow. How it freshens up my heart to see you!" she rejoiced as she poured out her tea into a saucer. "If you would only know how I used to beg my daughter to write for me a letter to you; but these American children, what is to them a mother's feelings?"

"What are you talking!" cried Mrs. Pelz. "The whole world rings with you and your children. Everybody is envying you. Tell me how began your luck?"

"You heard how my husband died with consumption," replied Hanneh Breineh. "The five hundred dollars lodge money gave me the first lift in life, and I opened a little grocery store. Then my son Abe married himself to a girl with a thousand dollars. That started him in business, and now he has the biggest shirt-waist factory on West Twenty-ninth Street."

"Yes, I heard your son had a factory." Mrs. Pelz hesitated and stammered: "I'll tell you the truth. What I came to ask you— I thought maybe you would beg your son Abe if he would give my husband a job."

"Why not?" said Hanneh Breineh. "He keeps more than five hundred hands. I'll ask him if he should take in Mr. Pelz."

"Long years on you, Hanneh Breineh! You'll save my life if you could only help my husband get work."

"Of course my son will help him. All my children like to do good. My daughter Fanny is a milliner on Fifth Avenue, and she takes in the poorest girls in her shop and even pays them sometimes while they learn the trade." Hanneh

Breineh's face lit up, and her chest filled with pride as she enumerated the successes of her children. "And my son Benny he wrote a play on Broadway and he gave away more than a hundred free tickets for the first night."

"Benny? The one who used to get lost from home all the time? You always did love that child more than all the rest. And what is Sammy your baby doing?"

"He ain't a baby no longer. He goes to college and quarterback the football team. They can't get along without him."

"And my son Jake, I nearly forgot him. He began collecting rent in Delancey Street, and now he is boss of renting the swellest apartment-houses on Riverside Drive."

"What did I tell you? In America children are like money in the bank," purred Mrs. Pelz, as she pinched and patted Hanneh Breineh's silk sleeve. "Oi weh! How it shines from you! You ought to kiss the air and dance for joy and happiness. It is such a bitter frost outside; a pail of coal is so dear, and you got it so warm with steam heat. I had to pawn my feather bed to have enough for the rent, and you are rolling in money."

"Yes, I got it good in some ways, but money ain't everything," sighed Hanneh Breineh.

"You ain't yet satisfied?"

"But here I got no friends," complained Hanneh Breineh.

"Friends?" queried Mrs. Pelz. "What greater friend is there on earth than the dollar?"

"Oi! Mrs. Pelz; if you could only look into my heart! I'm so choked up! You know they say a cow has a long tongue, but can't talk." Hanneh Breineh shook her head wistfully, and her eyes filmed with inward brooding. "My children give me everything from the best. When I was sick, they got me a nurse by day and one by night. They bought me the best wine. If I asked for dove's milk, they would buy it for

me; but—but—I can't talk myself out in their language. They want to make me over for an American lady, and I'm different." Tears cut their way under her eyelids with a pricking pain as she went on: "When I was poor, I was free, and could holler and do what I like in my own house. Here I got to lie still like a mouse under a broom. Between living up to my Fifth-Avenue daughter and keeping up with the servants, I am like a sinner in the next world that is thrown from one hell to another." The door-bell rang, and Hanneh Breineh jumped up with a start.

"Oi weh! It must be the servant back already!" she exclaimed, as she tore off her apron. "Oi weh! Let's quickly put the dishes together in a dish-pan. If she sees I eat on the kitchen table, she will look on me like the dirt under her feet."

Mrs. Pelz seized her shawl in haste.

"I better run home quick in my rags before your servant sees me."

"I'll speak to Abe about the job," said Hanneh Breineh, as she pushed a bill into the hand of Mrs. Pelz, who edged out as the servant entered.

"I'm having fried potato lotkes special for you, Benny," said Hanneh Breineh, as the children gathered about the table for the family dinner given in honor of Benny's success with his new play. "Do you remember how you used to lick the fingers from them?"

"Oh, mother!" reproved Fanny. "Anyone hearing you would think we were still in the pushcart district."

"Stop your nagging, sis, and let ma alone," commanded Benny, patting his mother's arm affectionately. "I'm home only once a month. Let her feed me what she pleases. My stomach is bomb-proof."

"Do I hear that the President is coming to your play?" said Abe, as he stuffed a napkin over his diamond-studded shirt-front.

"Why shouldn't he come?" returned Benny. "The critics say it's the greatest antidote for the race hatred created by the war. If you want to know, he is coming to-night; and what's more, our box is next to the President's."

"Nu, mammeh," sallied Jake, "did you ever dream in Delancey Street that we should rub sleeves with the President?"

"I always said that Benny had more head than the rest of you," replied the mother.

As the laughter died away, Jake went on:

"Honor you are getting plenty; but how much mezum-men does this play bring you? Can I invest any of it in real estate for you?"

"I'm getting ten percent royalties of the gross receipts," replied the youthful playwright.

"How much is that?" queried Hanneh Breineh.

"Enough to buy up all your fish-markets in Delancey Street," laughed Abe in good-natured raillery at his mother.

Her son's jest cut like a knife-thrust in her heart. She felt her heart ache with the pain that she was shut out from their successes. Each added triumph only widened the gulf. And when she tried to bridge this gulf by asking questions, they only thrust her back upon herself.

"Your fame has even helped me get my hat trade solid with the Four Hundred," put in Fanny. "You bet I let Mrs. Van Suyden know that our box is next to the President's. She said she would drop in to meet you. Of course she let on to me that she hadn't seen the play yet, though my designer said she saw her there on the opening night."

"Oh, gosh, the toadies!" sneered Benny. "Nothing so sickens you with success as the way people who once shoved



you off the sidewalk come crawling to you on their stomachs begging you to dine with them."

"Say, that leading man of yours he's some class!" cried Fanny. "That's the man I'm looking for. Will you invite him to supper after the theater?"

The playwright turned to his mother.

"Say, ma," he said, laughingly, "how would you like a real actor for a son-in-law?"

"She should worry," mocked Sam. "She'll be discussing with him the future of the Greek drama. Too bad it doesn't happen to be Warfield, or mother could give him tips on the 'Auctioneer.'"

Jake turned to his mother with a covert grin.

"I guess you'd have no objection if Fanny got next to Benny's leading man. He makes at least fifteen hundred a week. That wouldn't be such a bad addition to the family, would it?"

Again the bantering tone stabbed Hanneh Breineh. Everything in her began to tremble and break loose.

"Why do you ask me?" she cried, throwing her napkin into her plate. "Do I count for a person in this house? If I'll say something, will you even listen to me? What is to me the grandest man that my daughter could pick out? Another enemy in my house! Another person to shame himself from me!" She swept in her children in one glance of despairing anguish as she rose from the table. "What worth is an old mother to American children? The President is coming to-night to the theatre, and none of you asked me to go." Unable to check the rising tears, she fled toward the kitchen and banged the door.

They all looked at one another guiltily.

"Say, sis," Benny called out sharply, "what sort of frame-up is this? Haven't you told mother that she was to go with us to-night?"

"Yes—I—" Fanny bit her lips as she fumbled evasively for words. "I asked her if she wouldn't mind my taking her some other time."

"Now you have made a mess of it!" fumed Benny. "Mother'll be too hurt to go now."

"Well, I don't care," snapped Fanny. "I can't appear with mother in a box at the theatre. Can I introduce her to Mrs. Van Suyden? And suppose your leading man should ask to meet me?"

"Take your time, sis. He hasn't asked yet," scoffed Benny.

"The more reason I shouldn't spoil my chances. You know mother. She'll spill the beans that we come from Delancey Street the minute we introduce her anywhere. Must I always have the black shadow of my past trailing after me?"

"But have you no feelings for mother?" admonished Abe.

"I've tried harder than all of you to do my duty. I've *lived* with her." She turned angrily upon them. "I've borne the shame of mother while you bought her off with a present and a treat here and there. God knows how hard I tried to civilize her so as not to have to blush with shame when I take her anywhere. I dressed her in the most stylish Paris models, but Delancey Street sticks out from every inch of her. Whenever she opens her mouth, I'm done for. You fellows had your chance to rise in the world because a man is free to go up as high as he can reach up to; but I, with all my style and pep, can't get a man my equal because a girl is always judged by her mother."

They were silenced by her vehemence, and unconsciously turned to Benny.

"I guess we all tried to do our best for mother," said Benny, thoughtfully. "But wherever there is growth, there is pain and heartbreak. The trouble with us is that the

ghetto of the Middle Ages and the children of the twentieth century have to live under one roof, and—”

A sound of crashing dishes came from the kitchen, and the voice of Hanneh Breineh resounded through the dining-room as she wreaked her pent-up fury on the helpless servant.

“Oh, my nerves! I can’t stand it any more! There will be no girl again for another week!” cried Fanny.

“Oh, let up on the old lady,” protested Abe. “Since she can’t take it out on us any more, what harm is it if she cusses the servants?”

“If you fellows had to chase around employment agencies, you wouldn’t see anything funny about it. Why can’t we move into a hotel that will do away with the need of servants altogether?”

“I got it better,” said Jake, consulting a notebook from his pocket. “I have on my list an apartment on Riverside Drive where there’s only a small kitchenette; but we can do away with the cooking, for there is a dining service in the building.”

The new Riverside apartment to which Hanneh Breineh was removed by her socially ambitious children was for the habitually active mother an empty desert of enforced idleness. Deprived of her kitchen, Hanneh Breineh felt robbed of the last reason for her existence. Cooking and marketing and puttering busily with pots and pans gave her an excuse for living and struggling and bearing up with her children. The lonely idleness of Riverside Drive stunned all her senses and arrested all her thoughts. It gave her that choked sense of being cut off from air, from life, from everything warm and human. The cold indifference, the each-for-himself look in the eyes of the people about her were like stinging slaps in the face. Even the children had nothing real or human in

them. They were starched and stiff miniatures of their elders.

But the most unendurable part of the stifling life on Riverside Drive was being forced to eat in the public dining-room. No matter how hard she tried to learn polite table manners, she always found people staring at her, and her daughter rebuking her for eating with the wrong fork or guzzling the soup or staining the cloth.

In a fit of rebellion Hanneh Breineh resolved never to go down to the public dining-room again, but to make use of the gas-stove in the kitchenette to cook her own meals. That very day she rode down to Delancey Street and purchased a new market-basket. For some time she walked among the haggling pushcart venders, relaxing and swimming in the warm waves of her old familiar past.

A fish-peddler held up a large carp in his black, hairy hand and waved it dramatically:

"Women! Women! Fourteen cents a pound!"

He ceased his raucous shouting as he saw Hanneh Breineh in her rich attire approach his cart.

"How much?" she asked, pointing to the fattest carp.

"Fifteen cents, lady," said the peddler, smirking as he raised his price.

"Swindler! Didn't I hear you call fourteen cents?" shrieked Hanneh Breineh, exultingly, the spirit of the penny chase surging in her blood. Diplomatically, Hanneh Breineh turned as if to go, and the fisherman seized her basket in frantic fear.

"I should live; I'm losing money on the fish, lady," whined the peddler. "I'll let it down to thirteen cents for you only."

"Two pounds for a quarter, and not a penny more," said Hanneh Breineh, thrilling again with the rare sport of bargaining, which had been her chief joy in the good old days of poverty.

"Nu, I want to make the first sale for good luck." The peddler threw the fish on the scale.

As he wrapped up the fish, Hanneh Breineh saw the driven look of worry in his haggard eyes, and when he counted out the change from her dollar, she waved it aside. "Keep it for your luck," she said, and hurried off to strike a new bargain at a pushcart of onions.

Hanneh Breineh returned triumphantly with her purchases. The basket under her arm gave forth the old, home-like odors of herring and garlic, while the scaly tail of a four-pound carp protruded from its newspaper wrapping. A gilded placard on the door of the apartment-house proclaimed that all merchandise must be delivered through the trade entrance in the rear; but Hanneh Breineh with her basket strode proudly through the marble-paneled hall and rang nonchalantly for the elevator.

The uniformed hall-man, erect, expressionless, frigid with dignity, stepped forward:

"Just a minute, madam. I'll call a boy to take up your basket for you."

Hanneh Breineh, glaring at him, jerked the basket savagely from his hands. "Mind your own business!" she retorted. "I'll take it up myself. Do you think you're a Russian policeman to boss me in my own house?"

Angry lines appeared on the countenance of the representative of social decorum.

"It is against the rules, madam," he said, stiffly.

"You should sink into the earth with all your rules and brass buttons. Ain't this America? Ain't this a free country? Can't I take up in my own house what I buy with my own money?" cried Hanneh Breineh, reveling in the opportunity to shower forth the volley of invectives that had been suppressed in her for the weeks of deadly dignity of Riverside Drive.

In the midst of this uproar Fanny came in with Mrs. Van Suyden. Hanneh Breineh rushed over to her, crying:

"This bossy policeman won't let me take up my basket in the elevator."

The daughter, unnerved with shame and confusion, took the basket in her white-gloved hand and ordered the hall-boy to take it around to the regular delivery entrance.

Hanneh Breineh was so hurt by her daughter's apparent defense of the hall-man's rules that she utterly ignored Mrs. Van Suyden's greeting and walked up the seven flights of stairs out of sheer spite.

"You see the tragedy of my life?" broke out Fanny, turning to Mrs. Van Suyden.

"You poor child! You go right up to your dear, old lady mother, and I'll come some other time."

Instantly Fanny regretted her words. Mrs. Van Suyden's pity only roused her wrath the more against her mother.

Breathless from climbing the stairs, Hanneh Breineh entered the apartment just as Fanny tore the faultless millinery creation from her head and threw it on the floor in a rage.

"Mother, you are the ruination of my life! You have driven away Mrs. Van Suyden, as you have driven away all my best friends. What do you think we got this apartment for but to get rid of your fish smells and your brawls with the servants? And here you come with a basket on your arm as if you just landed from steerage! And this afternoon, of all times, when Benny is bringing his leading man to tea. When will you ever stop disgracing us?"

"When I'm dead," said Hanneh Breineh, grimly. "When the earth will cover me up, then you'll be free to go your American way. I'm not going to make myself over for a lady on Riverside Drive. I hate you and all your swell friends. I'll not let myself be choked up here by you or by that hall-

boss policeman that is higher in your eyes than your own mother."

"So that's your thanks for all we've done for you?" cried the daughter.

"All you've done for me!" shouted Hanneh Breineh. "What have you done for me? You hold me like a dog on a chain! It stands in the Talmud; some children give their mothers dry bread and water and go to heaven for it, and some give their mother roast duck and go to Gehenna because it's not given with love."

"You want me to love you yet?" raged the daughter. "You knocked every bit of love out of me when I was yet a kid. All the memories of childhood I have is your everlasting cursing and yelling that we were gluttons."

The bell rang sharply, and Hanneh Breineh flung open the door.

"Your groceries, ma'am," said the boy.

Hanneh Breineh seized the basket from him, and with a vicious fling sent it rolling across the room, strewn its contents over the Persian rugs and inlaid floor. Then seizing her hat and coat, she stormed out of the apartment and down the stairs.

Mr. and Mrs. Pelz sat crouched and shivering over their meager supper when the door opened, and Hanneh Breineh in fur coat and plumed hat charged into the room.

"I come to cry out to you my bitter heart," she sobbed. "Woe is me! It is so black for my eyes!"

"What is the matter with you, Hanneh Breineh?" cried Mrs. Pelz in bewildered alarm.

"I am turned out of my own house by the brass-buttoned policeman that bosses the elevator. Oi-i-i-i! Weh-h-h-h! What have I from my life? The whole world rings with my son's play. Even the President came to see it, and I, his

mother, have not seen it yet. My heart is dying in me like in a prison," she went on wailing. "I am starved out for a piece of real eating. In that swell restaurant is nothing but napkins and forks and lettuce-leaves. There are a dozen plates to every bite of food. And it looks so fancy on the plate, but it's nothing but straw in the mouth. I'm starving, but I can't swallow down their American eating."

"Hanneh Breineh," said Mrs. Pelz, "you are sinning before God. Look on your fur coat; it alone would feed a whole family for a year. I never had yet a piece of fur trimming on a coat, and you are in fur from the neck to the feet. I never had yet a piece of feather on a hat, and your hat is all feathers."

"What are you envying me?" protested Hanneh Breineh. "What have I from all my fine furs and feathers when my children are strangers to me? All the fur coats in the world can't warm up the loneliness inside my heart. All the grandest feathers can't hide the bitter shame in my face that my children shame themselves from me."

Hanneh Breineh suddenly loomed over them like some ancient, heroic figure of the Bible condemning unrighteousness.

"Why should my children shame themselves from me? From where did they get the stuff to work themselves up in the world? Did they get it from the air? How did they get all their smartness to rise over the people around them? Why don't the children of born American mothers write my Benny's plays? It is I, who never had a chance to be a person, who gave him the fire in his head. If I would have had a chance to go to school and learn the language, what couldn't I have been? It is I and my mother and my mother's mother and my father and father's father who had such a black life in Poland; it is our choked thoughts and feelings that are flaming up in my children and making them great



in America. And yet they shame themselves from me!"

For a moment Mr. and Mrs. Pelz were hypnotized by the sweep of her words. Then Hanneh Breineh sank into a chair in utter exhaustion. She began to weep bitterly, her body shaking with sobs.

"Woe is me! For what did I suffer and hope on my children? A bitter old age—my end. I'm so lonely!"

All the dramatic fire seemed to have left her. The spell was broken. They saw the Hanneh Breineh of old, ever discontented, ever complaining even in the midst of riches and plenty.

"Hanneh Breineh," said Mrs. Pelz, "the only trouble with you is that you got it too good. People will tear the eyes out of your head because you're complaining yet. If I only had your fur coat! If I only had your diamonds! I have nothing. You have everything. You are living on the fat of the land. You go right back home and thank God that you don't have my bitter lot."

"You got to let me stay here with you," insisted Hanneh Breineh. "I'll not go back to my children except when they bury me. When they will see my dead face, they will understand how they killed me."

Mrs. Pelz glanced nervously at her husband. They barely had enough covering for their one bed; how could they possibly lodge a visitor?

"I don't want to take up your bed," said Hanneh Breineh. "I don't care if I have to sleep on the floor or on the chairs, but I'll stay here for the night."

Seeing that she was bent on staying, Mr. Pelz prepared to sleep by putting a few chairs next to the trunk, and Hanneh Breineh was invited to share the rickety bed with Mrs. Pelz.

The mattress was full of lumps and hollows. Hanneh Breineh lay cramped and miserable, unable to stretch out her limbs. For years she had been accustomed to hair mat-

tresses and ample woolen blankets, so that though she covered herself with her fur coat, she was too cold to sleep. But worse than the cold were the creeping things on the wall. And as the lights were turned low, the mice came through the broken plaster and raced across the floor. The foul odors of the kitchen-sink added to the night horrors.

"Are you going back home?" asked Mrs. Pelz, as Hanneh Breineh put on her hat and coat the next morning.

"I don't know where I'm going," she replied, as she put a bill into Mrs. Pelz's hand.

For hours Hanneh Breineh walked through the crowded ghetto streets. She realized that she no longer could endure the sordid ugliness of her past, and yet she could not go home to her children. She only felt that she must go on and on.

In the afternoon a cold, drizzling rain set in. She was worn out from the sleepless night and hours of tramping. With a piercing pain in her heart she at last turned back and boarded the subway for Riverside Drive. She had fled from the marble sepulcher of the Riverside apartment to her old home in the ghetto; but now she knew that she could not live there again. She had outgrown her past by the habits of years of physical comforts, and these material comforts that she could no longer do without choked and crushed the life within her.

A cold shudder went through Hanneh Breineh as she approached the apartment-house. Peering through the plate glass of the door she saw the face of the uniformed hall-man. For a hesitating moment she remained standing in the drizzling rain, unable to enter, and yet knowing full well that she would have to enter.

Then suddenly Hanneh Breineh began to laugh. She realized that it was the first time she had laughed since her children had become rich. But it was the hard laugh of

bitter sorrow. Tears streamed down her furrowed cheeks as she walked slowly up the granite steps.

"The fat of the land!" muttered Hanneh Breineh, with a choking sob as the hall-man with immobile face deferentially swung open the door—"the fat of the land!"



## THE APOSTATE<sup>1</sup>

BY GEORGE MILBURN

*A father who resigned from Rotary to please his critical adolescent son discovers the son's fraternity to be a Rotary club in embryo.*

HARRY, you been jacking me up about how I been neglecting Rotary here lately, so I'm just going to break down and tell you something. Now I don't want you to take this personal, Harry, because it's not meant personal at all. No siree! Not *a-tall*! But, just between you and I, Harry, I'm not going to be coming out to Rotary lunches any more. I mean I'm quitting Rotary! . . .

Now whoa there! Whoa! Whoa just a minute and let me get in a word edgeways. Just let me finish my little say.

Don't you never get it into your head that I haven't been wrestling with this thing plenty. I mean I've argued it all out with myself. Now I'm going to tell you the whyfor and the whereof and the howcome about this, Harry, but kindly don't let what I say go no further. Please keep it strictly on the Q.T. Because I guess the rest of the boys would suspicion that I was turning highbrow on them. But you've always been a buddy to me, Harry, you mangy old son of a hoss thief, you, so what I'm telling you is the straight dope.

Harry, like you no doubt remember, up till a few months ago Rotary was about "the most fondest thing I is of," as

<sup>1</sup> From *Trumpets* by George Milburn (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1933).

the nigger says. There wasn't nothing that stood higher for me than Rotary.

Well, here about a year ago last fall I took a trip down to the university to visit my son and go to a football game. You know Hubert Junior, my boy. Sure. Well, this is his second year down at the university. Yes sir, that boy is getting a college education. I mean, I'm all for youth having a college education.

Of course I think there is such a thing as too much education working a detriment. Take, for instance, some of these longhairs running around knocking the country right now. But what I mean is, a good, sound, substantial college education. I don't mean a string of letters a yard long for a man to write after his John Henry. I just mean that I want my boy to have his sheepskin, they call it, before he starts out in the world. Like the fellow says, I want him to get his A.B. degree, and then he can go out and get his J.O.B.

Now, Harry, I always felt like a father has got certain responsibilities to his son. That's just good Rotary. That's all that is. You know that that's just good Rotary yourself, Harry. Well, I always wanted Hubert to think about me just like I was a pal to him, or say an older brother, maybe. I don't know that him and I ever was that way in the fullest sense of the word, but God knows I've tried to make things like that between us. I mean I've always wanted to be just a big buddy to Hubert.

I'm not saying that I haven't made a pretty poor out of it sometimes. But anyhow that's the spirit I've tried to get into our relationships ever since he was a little tike. Too many parents never actually get acquainted with their boys, see, Harry? I always encouraged Hubert to come to me and talk things over just like it was man to man. I will admit that since Hubert got older I would sometimes find out things he had been keeping from me, especially after he got girl

crazy. But however, as I say, Harry, Hubert always knew that all he had to do was to come to me, and I would act like a big buddy to him, irregardless.

Well, like I was telling you, Harry, I started Hubert in to the university two years ago, and after he had been there about two months, I thought I would run down and see how he was getting along and go to a football game. So I and Mrs. T. drove over one Friday. We didn't know the town very well, so we stopped at a filling station, and I give Hubert a ring, and he come right on down to where we was to show us the way. Just as soon as he come up, I could see right then that he had something on his mind bothering him.

He called me aside and took me into the filling-station rest-room, and says: "For the love of God, Dad, take that Rotary button out of your coat lapel," he says to me.

Harry, that come as a plenty big surprise to me, and I don't mind telling you that it just about took the wind out of my sails. But I wasn't going to let on to him, so I rared back on my dignity, and says: "Why, what do you mean, take that Rotary button out of my lapel, young man?" I says to him.

"Dad," Hubert says to me, serious, "any frat house has always got a few cynics in it. If you was to wear that Rotary button in your lapel out to the frat house, just as soon as you got out of sight, some of those boys at the house would razz the life out of me," he says.

"Hubert," I says, "there's not a thing that this lapel badge represents that any decent, normal person could afford to make fun of. If that's the kind of Reds you got out at your fraternity, the kind that would razz a what you might call sacred thing—yes sir, a sacred thing—like Rotary, well I and your mamma can just go somewheres else and put up. I don't guess the hotels have quit running," I says to him.

By now I was on my high horse right, see?

"Now, Dad," Hubert says, "it's not that. I mean, person'ly I'm awful proud of you. It's just that I haven't been pledged to this fraternity long, see, and when some of those older members found out you were a Rotarian they would deal me a lot of misery, and I couldn't say nothing. Person'ly I think Rotary is all right," he says to me.

"Well, you better, son," I says, "or I'm going to begin to think that you're sick in the head."

The way he explained it, though, Harry, that made it a horse of a different tail, as the saying goes, so I gave in and took off my Rotary button right there. Stuck it in my pocket, see? So we went on out and visited at Hubert's fraternity house, and do you know that those boys just got around there and treated we folks like we was princes of the blood. I mean you would of thought that I was an old ex-graduate of that university. And we saw the big pigskin tussle the next day, fourteen to aught, favor us, and we had such a scrumptious time all around I forgot all about what Hubert had said.

Ever'thing would of been all right, except for what happened later. I guess some of those older boys at the frat house began using their form of psychology on Hubert. I mean they finally got his mind set against Rotary, because when he came home for the summer vacation that was about the size of it.

I mean all last summer I thought Hubert never would let up. He just kept it up, making sarcastic remarks about Rotary, see? Even when we was on our vacation trip. You know we drove out to California and back last summer, Harry. Come back with the same air in the tires we started out with. Well, I thought it would be kind of nice to drop in and eat with the Hollywood Rotary—you know, just to be able to say I had. So I contacted them and had ever'thing all fixed up. Well, do you know that that boy Hubert made

so much fun of the idea I just had to give it up? That was the way it was the whole trip. He got his mother around on his side, too. Just to be frank with you, I never got so sick and tired of anything in all my born days.

Well, Harry, I had my dander up there for a while, and all the bickering in the world couldn't of shook me from my stand. But finely Hubert went back to college in September, and I thought I would have a little peace. Then I got to thinking about it, and it all come over me. "Look here, Mister Man," I says to myself, "your faith and loyalty to Rotary may be a fine thing, and all that, but it's just costing you the fellowship of your own son." Now a man can't practice Rotary in the higher sense, and yet at the same time be letting his own son's fellowship get loose from him. So there it was. Blood's thicker than water, Harry. You'll have to admit that.

Right along in there, Harry, was the first time I begin to attending meetings irregular. I'll tell you—you might not think so—but it was a pretty tough struggle for me. I remember one Monday noon, Rotary-meeting day, I happened to walk past the Hotel Beckman just at lunchtime. The windows of the Venetian room was open, and I could hear you boys singing a Rotary song. You know that one we sing set to the tune of "Last Night on the Back Porch." It goes:

I love the Lions in the morning  
The Exchange Club at night  
I love the Y's men in the evening  
And Kiwanis are all right . . .

Well, I couldn't carry a tune if I had it in a sack, but anyway that's the way it goes. So I just stopped in my tracks and stood there listening to that song coming out of the Hotel Beckman dining-room. And then the boys come to the last verse,



I love the Optimists in the springtime  
The Ad Club in the fall  
But each day—and in every way—  
I love Rotary best of all . . .

I tell you, Harry, that just got me. I had a lump in my throat big enough to choke a cow. The tears begin to come up in my eyes, and it might sound ridiculous to hear me tell it now, but I could of broke down and bawled right there on the street. I got a grip on myself and walked on off, but right then I says to myself: "The hell with Hubert and his highbrow college-fraternity ideas; I'm going back to Rotary next week."

Well, I did go back the next week, and what happened decided me on taking the step I decided on. Here's what decided me. You know, I never got very well acquainted with Gay Harrison, the new secretary. I mean, of course, I know him all right, but he hasn't been in Rotary only about a year. Well, on that particular day, I just happened to let my tongue slip and called him Mister Harrison, instead of by his nickname. Well, of course, the boys slapped a dollar fine on me right then and there. I haven't got no kick to make about that, but the point is, I had a letter from Hubert in my pocket right then, telling me that he had run short of money. So I just couldn't help but be struck by the idea "I wish I was giving Hubert this dollar." So that's what decided me on devoting my time and finances to another kind of fellowship, Harry.

I get down to the university to see Hubert more frequent now. I make it a point to. And the boys come to me, and I begin helping them a little on their frat building fund. There's a fine spirit of fellowship in an organization like that. Some boys from the best families of the State are members, too. You might think from what I said that they'd be uppish, but they're not. No siree. Not a bit of it. I been down

there enough for them to know me, now, and they all pound me on the back and call me H.T., just like I was one of them. And I do them, too. And I notice that when they sit down to a meal, they have some songs they sing just as lively and jolly as any we had at Rotary. Of course, like Hubert said, a few of them might have some wild-haired ideas about Rotary, but they're young yet. And as far as I can see there's not a knocker nor a sourbelly among them. Absolutely democratic.

It puts me in mind of a little incident that happened last month when the frat threw a big Dad's Day banquet for us down there. All the fathers of the boys from all over the State was there. Well, to promote the spirit of fellowship between dad and son, the fraternity boys all agreed to call their dads by their first name, just treating the dads like big buddies. So at the table Hubert happened to forget for a minute, and says to me "Dad" something. Well sir, the president of the frat flashed right out: "All right, Hubie, we heard you call H.T. 'Dad.' So that'll just cost you a dollar for the ice-cream fund." Ever'body had a good laugh at Hubert getting caught like that, but do you know, that boy of mine just forked right over without making a kick. That shows the stuff, don't it, Harry? Nothing wrong with a boy like that.

And the whole bunch is like that, ever' one of them. I'll tell you, Harry, the boys of that frat of Hubert's are the builders in the coming generation. Any man of vision can see that.

Well, that's that. Now what was you going to say?



## MR. REGINALD PEACOCK'S DAY<sup>1</sup>

BY KATHERINE MANSFIELD

*It was incredible, he thought, that she cared so little for him—incredible that she wasn't interested in the slightest in his triumphs and his artistic career. When so many women in her place would have given their eyes. . . . Yes, he knew it. . . . Why not acknowledge it? . . . Why had he married her? The truth was that there was nothing more fatal for an artist than marriage.*

IF there was one thing that he hated more than another it was the way she had of waking him in the morning. She did it on purpose, of course. It was her way of establishing her grievance for the day, and he was not going to let her know how successful it was. But really, really, to wake a sensitive person like that was positively dangerous! It took him hours to get over it—simply hours. She came into the room buttoned up in an overall, with a handkerchief over her head—thereby proving that she had been up herself and slaving since dawn—and called in a low warning voice: "Reginald!"

"Eh! What! What's that? What's the matter?"

"It's time to get up; it's half-past eight." And out she went, shutting the door quietly after her, to gloat over her triumph, he supposed.

He rolled over in the big bed, his heart still beating in

<sup>1</sup> From *Bliss* by Katherine Mansfield (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1921).

quick, dull throbs, and with every throb he felt his energy escaping him, his—his inspiration for the day stifling under those thudding blows. It seemed that she took a malicious delight in making life more difficult for him than—Heaven knows—it was, by denying him his rights as an artist, by trying to drag him down to her level. What was the matter with her? What the hell did she want? Hadn't he three times as many pupils now as when they were first married, earned three times as much, paid for every stick and stone that they possessed, and now had begun to shell out for Adrian's kindergarten? . . . And had he ever reproached her for not having a penny to her name? Never a word—never a sign! The truth was that once you married a woman she became insatiable, and the truth was that there was nothing more fatal for an artist than marriage, at any rate until he was well over forty. . . . Why had he married her? He asked himself this question on an average about three times a day, but he never could answer it satisfactorily. She had caught him at a weak moment, when the first plunge into reality had bewildered and overwhelmed him for a time. Looking back, he saw a pathetic, youthful creature, half child, half wild untamed bird, totally incompetent to cope with bills and creditors and all the sordid details of existence. Well—she had done her best to clip his wings, if that was any satisfaction for her, and she could congratulate herself on the success of this early morning trick. One ought to wake exquisitely, reluctantly, he thought, slipping down in the warm bed. He began to imagine a series of enchanting scenes which ended with his latest, most charming pupil putting her bare, scented arms round his neck, and covering him with her long, perfumed hair. "Awake, my love!" . . .

As was his daily habit, while the bath water ran, Reginald Peacock tried his voice.

When her mother tends her before the laughing mirror,  
Looping up her laces, tying up her hair,

he sang, softly at first, listening to the quality, nursing his voice until he came to the third line:

Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded . . .

and upon the word "wedded" he burst into such a shout of triumph that the tooth-glass on the bathroom shelf trembled and even the bath tap seemed to gush stormy applause. . . .

Well, there was nothing wrong with his voice, he thought, leaping into the bath and soaping his soft, pink body all over with a loofah shaped like a fish. He could fill Covent Garden with it! "Wedded!" he shouted again, seizing the towel with a magnificent operatic gesture, and went on singing while he rubbed as though he had been Lohengrin tipped out by an unwary Swan and drying himself in the greatest haste before that tiresome Elsa came along—along. . . .

Back in his bedroom, he pulled the blind up with a jerk, and standing upon the pale square of sunlight that lay upon the carpet like a sheet of cream blotting-paper, he began to do his exercises—deep breathing, bending forward and back, squatting like a frog and shooting out his legs—for if there was one thing he had a horror of it was of getting fat, and men in his profession had a dreadful tendency that way. However, there was no sign of it at present. He was, he decided, just right, just in good proportion. In fact he could not help a thrill of satisfaction when he saw himself in the glass, dressed in a morning coat, dark gray trousers, gray socks and a black tie with a silver thread in it. Not that he was vain—he couldn't stand vain men—no; the sight of himself gave him a thrill of purely artistic satisfaction. "*Voilà tout!*" said he, passing his hand over his sleek hair.

That little easy French phrase blown so lightly from his lips, like a whiff of smoke, reminded him that someone had asked him again, the evening before, if he was English. People seemed to find it impossible to believe that he hadn't some Southern blood. True, there was an emotional quality in his singing that had nothing of the John Bull in it. . . . The door-handle rattled and turned round and round. Adrian's head popped through.

"Please, Father, Mother says breakfast is quite ready please."

"Very well," said Reginald. Then, just as Adrian disappeared: "Adrian!"

"Yes, Father."

"You haven't said 'good-morning.'"

A few months ago Reginald had spent a week-end in a very aristocratic family, where the father received his little sons in the morning and shook hands with them. Reginald thought the practice charming, and introduced it immediately, but Adrian felt dreadfully silly at having to shake hands with his own father every morning. And why did his father always sort of sing to him instead of talk?

In excellent temper, Reginald walked into the dining-room and sat down before a pile of letters, a copy of the *Times*, and a little covered dish. He glanced at the letters and then at his breakfast. There were two thin slices of bacon and one egg.

"Don't you want any bacon?" he asked.

"No, I prefer cold baked apple. I don't feel the need of bacon every morning."

Now, did she mean that there was no need for him to have bacon every morning, either, and that she grudged having to cook it for him?

"If you don't want to cook the breakfast," said he, "why don't you keep a servant? You know we can afford one, and

you know how I loathe to see my wife doing the work. Simply because all the women we have had in the past have been failures, and utterly upset my régime, and made it almost impossible for me to have any pupils here, you've given up trying to find a decent woman. It's not impossible to train a servant—is it? I mean, it doesn't require genius?"

"But I prefer to do the work myself, it makes life so much more peaceful. . . . Run along, Adrian darling, and get ready for school."

"Oh, no, that's not it!" Reginald pretended to smile. "You do the work yourself, because, for some extraordinary reason, you love to humiliate me. Objectively you may not know that, but, subjectively, it's the case." This last remark so delighted him that he cut open an envelope as gracefully as if he had been on the stage. . . .

Dear. Mr. Peacock:

I feel that I cannot go to sleep until I have thanked you again for the wonderful joy your singing gave me this evening. Quite unforgettable. You make me wonder, as I have not wondered since I was a girl, if this is *all*. I mean, if this ordinary world is *all*. If there is not, perhaps, for those of us who understand, divine beauty and richness awaiting us if we only have the *courage* to see it. And to make it ours. . . . The house is so quiet. I wish you were here now that I might thank you in person. You are doing a great thing. You are teaching the world to escape from life!

Yours, most sincerely,  
Aenone Fell.

P.S. I am in every afternoon this week. . . .

The letter was scrawled in violet ink on thick, handmade paper. Vanity, that bright bird, lifted its wings again, lifted them until he felt his breast would break.

"Oh, well, don't let us quarrel," said he, and actually flung out a hand to his wife.

But she was not great enough to respond.

"I must hurry and take Adrian to school," she said. "Your room is quite ready for you."

Very well—very well—let there be open war between them! But he was hanged if he'd be the first to make it up again!

He walked up and down his room, and was not calm again until he heard the outer door close upon Adrian and his wife. Of course, if this went on, he would have to make some other arrangement. That was obvious. Tied and bound like this, how could he help the world to escape from life? He opened the piano and looked up his pupils for the morning. Miss Betty Brittle, the Countess Wilkowska and Miss Marian Morrow. They were charming, all three.

Punctually at half-past ten the door-bell rang. He went to the door. Miss Betty Brittle was there, dressed in white, with her music in a blue silk case.

"I'm afraid I'm early," she said, blushing and shy, and she opened her big blue eyes very wide. "Am I?"

"Not at all, dear lady. I am only too charmed," said Reginald. "Won't you come in?"

"It's such a heavenly morning," said Miss Brittle. "I walked across the Park. The flowers were too marvelous."

"Well think about them while you sing your exercises," said Reginald, sitting down at the piano. "It will give your voice color and warmth."

Oh, what an enchanting idea! What a genius Mr. Peacock was. She parted her pretty lips, and began to sing like a pansy.

"Very good, very good, indeed," said Reginald, playing chords that would waft a hardened criminal to heaven. "Make the notes round. Don't be afraid. Linger over them, breathe them like a perfume."

How pretty she looked, standing there in her white frock,



and her little blonde head tilted, showing her milky throat.

"Do you ever practise before the glass?" asked Reginald. "You ought to, you know it makes the lips more flexible. Come over here."

They went over to the mirror and stood side by side.

"Now sing—moo-e-koo-e-oo-e-a!"

But she broke down, and blushed more brightly than ever.

"Oh," she cried, "I can't. It makes me feel so silly. It makes me want to laugh. I do look so absurd!"

"No, you don't. Don't be afraid," said Reginald, but laughed, too, very kindly. "Now, try again!"

The lesson simply flew, and Betty Brittle quite got over her shyness.

"When can I come again?" she asked, tying the music up again in the blue silk case. "I want to take as many lessons as I can just now. Oh, Mr. Peacock, I do enjoy them so much. May I come the day after to-morrow?"

"Dear lady, I shall be only too charmed," said Reginald, bowing her out.

Glorious girl! And when they had stood in front of the mirror, her white sleeve had just touched his black one. He could feel—yes, he could actually feel a warm glowing spot, and he stroked it. She loved her lessons. His wife came in.

"Reginald, can you let me have some money? I must pay the dairy. And will you be in for dinner to-night?"

"Yes, you know I am singing at Lord Timbuck's at half-past nine. Can you make me some clear soup, with an egg in it?"

"Yes. And the money, Reginald. It's eight and sixpence."

"Surely that's very heavy—isn't it?"

"No it's just what it ought to be. And Adrian must have milk."

There she was—off again. Now she was standing up for Adrian against him.

"I have not the slightest desire to deny my child a proper amount of milk," said he. "Here is ten shillings."

The door-bell rang. He went to the door.

"Oh," said the Countess Wilkowska, "the stairs. I have not a breath." And she put her hand over her heart as she followed him into the music-room. She was all in black, with a little black hat with a floating veil—violets in her bosom.

"Do not make me sing exercises to-day," she cried, throwing out her hands in her delightful foreign way. "No, to-day I want only to sing songs. . . . And may I take off my violets? They fade so soon."

"They fade so soon—they fade so soon," played Reginald on the piano.

"May I put them here?" asked the Countess, dropping them in a little vase that stood in front of one of Reginald's photographs.

"Dear lady, I should be only too charmed!"

She began to sing, and all was well until she came to the phrase: "You love me. Yes, I *know* you love me!" Down dropped his hands from the keyboard, he wheeled around, facing her.

"No, no; that's not good enough. You can do better than that," cried Reginald ardently. "You must sing as if you were in love. Listen; let me try to show you." And he sang.

"Oh, yes, yes. I see what you mean," stammered the little Countess. "May I try it again?"

"Certainly. Do not be afraid. Let yourself go. Confess yourself. Make proud surrender!" he called above the music. And she sang.

"Yes; better that time. But I still feel you are capable of more. Try it with me. There must be a kind of exultant defiance as well—don't you feel?" And they sang together.

Ah! now she was sure she understood. "May I try once again?"

You love me. Yes, I *know* you love me."

The lesson was over before that phrase was quite perfect. The little foreign hands trembled as they put the music together.

"And you are forgetting your violets," said Reginald softly.

"Yes, I think I will forget them," said the Countess, biting her under lip. What fascinating ways these foreign women have!

"And you will come to my house on Sunday and make music?" she asked.

"Dear lady, I shall be only too charmed!" said Reginald.

Weep ye no more, sad fountains  
Why need ye flow so fast?

sang Miss Marian Morrow, but her eyes filled with tears and her chin trembled.

"Don't sing just now," said Reginald. "Let me play it for you." He played so softly.

"Is there anything the matter?" asked Reginald. "You're not quite happy this morning."

No, she wasn't; she was awfully miserable.

"You don't care to tell me what it is?"

It really was nothing in particular. She had those moods sometimes when life seemed almost unbearable.

"Ah, I know," he said; "if I could only help!"

"But you do; you do! Oh, if it were not for my lessons I don't feel that I could go on."

"Sit down in the arm-chair and smell the violets and let me sing to you. It will do you just as much good as a lesson."

Why weren't all men like Mr. Peacock?

"I wrote a poem after the concert last night—just about what I felt. . . . Of course, it wasn't *personal*. May I send it to you?"

"Dear lady, I should be only too charmed!"

By the end of the afternoon he was quite tired and lay down on a sofa to rest his voice before dressing. The door of his room was open. He could hear Adrian and his wife talking in the dining-room.

"Do you know what the teapot reminds me of, Mummy? It reminds me of a little sitting-down kitten."

"Does it, Mr. Absurdity?"

Reginald dozed. The telephone bell woke him.

"Aenone Fell is speaking. Mr. Peacock, I have just heard that you were singing at Lord Timbuck's to-night. Will you dine with me, and we can go on together afterwards?" And the words of his reply dropped like flowers down the telephone:

"Dear lady, I should be only too charmed."

What a triumphal evening! The little dinner *tête-à-tête* with Aenone Fell, the drive to Lord Timbuck's in her white motor-car, when she thanked him again for the unforgettable joy. Triumph upon triumph! And Lord Timbuck's champagne simply flowed.

"Have some more champagne, Peacock," said Lord Timbuck. Peacock, you notice—not Mr. Peacock—but Peacock, as if he were one of them. And wasn't he? He was an artist. He could sway them all. And wasn't he teaching them all to escape from life? How he sang! And as he sang, as in a dream he saw their feathers and their flowers and their fans, offered to him, laid before him, like a huge bouquet.

"Have another glass of wine, Peacock."

"I could have any one I liked by lifting a finger," thought Peacock, positively staggering home.

But as he let himself into the dark flat his marvelous sense

of elation began to ebb away. He turned up the light in the bedroom. His wife lay asleep, squeezed over to her side of the bed. He remembered suddenly how she had said when he told her he was going out to dinner: "You might have let me know before!" And how he had answered: "Can't you possibly speak to me without offending against even good manners?" It was incredible, he thought, that she cared so little for him—incredible that she wasn't interested in the slightest in his triumphs and his artistic career. When so many women in her place would have given their eyes. . . . Yes, he knew it. . . . Why not acknowledge it? . . . And there she lay, an enemy, even in her sleep. . . . Must it ever be thus? he thought, the champagne still working. Ah, if we were only friends, how much I could tell her now! About this evening; even about Timbuck's manner to me, and all that they said to me and so on and so on. If only I felt that she was here to come back to—that I could confide in her—and so on and so on.

In his emotion he pulled off his evening boot and simply hurled it in the corner. The noise woke his wife with a terrible start. She sat up, pushing back her hair. And he suddenly decided to have one more try to treat her as a friend, to tell her everything, to win her. Down he sat on the side of the bed, and seized one of her hands. But of all those splendid things he had to say, not one could he utter. For some fiendish reason, the only words he could get out were: "Dear lady, I should be charmed—so charmed!"



## UPROOTED <sup>1</sup>

BY RUTH SUCKOW

*"Now, as I've figured it out," Sam went on smoothly, "it's practically impossible for mother and father to spend another winter here alone. Isn't that about the size of it, Hat?" . . . Jen rocked, her lips tightly pursed together. It was as she had expected. . . . "I think those who are best able to take them, ought to," she cried.*

HAT had brought "the relationship" together at the old home this summer. She had written that the old folks were getting pretty feeble, especially Ma, ever since that fall she had had in the winter, and that it was time something was being done. Everyone had felt that it could not be put off much longer.

They were all in the parlor now. They had come there with one accord after dinner, as if there had been a secret compact among them. There was a general conviction that the time had come to "settle something." The sense of conspiracy that attends family conclaves lay heavy upon them. The air was thick with undercurrents of feeling, schemes, secret alliances and antipathies. They had all eaten too much and they sat with the discomfort of middle age in the stiff old-fashioned chairs. The three men were making a pretense that the whole affair amounted to nothing. They refused to

<sup>1</sup> From *Iowa Interiors* by Ruth Suckow. Copyright, 1926, and reprinted by permission of Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., publishers.

meet the meaning glances, full of dire warning and portent, which their wives cast at them from time to time. Whenever, in a pause of the furious squeaking of Jen's rocking chair, the clatter of dishes and shrill children's voices sounded loud from the kitchen, they were suddenly stricken, condemned with an obscure sense of guilt.

This was their chance. The old people and the children, who were "not supposed to know," were out of the way. Ma had been persuaded to lie down in her bedroom. Pa had been sent to show the chickens and the cow to Hat's little Benny. Jen's Margaret and Hat's Allie had been bribed and commanded to wash the dinner dishes. Jen's Herbert had been the worst to dispose of. Just when they thought they were rid of him, he would be discovered in the doorway, staring at them through the big tortoise-shell spectacles that he had just begun to wear, solemn and uncannily disconcerting. Finally Sam had sent him down town with fifty cents to consume chocolate sodas in Vielle's Ice Cream Parlor.

But it was hard to make use of the chance they had tried so long to get. The little parlor was suddenly and overwhelmingly eloquent of the life that had been in it. The close musty air, thick with the smell of the carpet, told that it had not been opened for months. It had a dank chill, even in the clear warmth of the September afternoon. The enlarged pictures on the walls looked as if they had frozen into their silver frames. The closed organ, with its insertions of faded silk, was a tomb of wheezy melodies. The big illustrated Bible with its steel clasp lay beside the Life of Abraham Lincoln—which Art had peddled once—on the knitted lace doily of the stand. Knitted tidies were fastened with ribbons to the backs of chairs. A black memorial card on one of the little balconies of the organ stated in gold that John Luther Shafer had died at the age of thirty-two—"The Lord

giveth, and the Lord taketh away." A large pink shell lay beside the door. A bunch of withered pampas grass stuck up from a blue-painted vase in the corner.

The women had entered into a discussion of operations—the one neutral spot on which they could still meet. The men let out a conscientious word from time to time. They crossed and recrossed their knees.

Sam tried to make Lou look at him. He wanted to get back to the hotel. He could not get settled in the bumpy springs of the great orange plush chair where he was sitting. Sam had grown used to easy chairs.

". . . Oh, yes, it was an awful thing," Lou was saying. "They had to cut away one whole side of the breast."

Tch-tch went the women's tongues.

"Well—it's a miracle what they can do these days," said Jen after a pause.

Sam gave a bounce in the orange chair. "Well, folkses, isn't it about time we were getting down to business?" he asked, with a heavy assumption of cheerfulness.

A sudden solemn quiet fell upon them all. They cleared their throats and changed positions. The magnificent pretense of a pleasant family gathering which they had been instinctively keeping up was shattered. Sam twisted in his chair with the sense that he had made a social blunder. Lou, who should have backed him up, had put on an air of elaborate unconcern. The other women had a hungry look of suppressed excitement. Little Henry, Hat's husband, who was the poorest and had the least to say, gazed with a mild boredom at his swinging foot.

Sam refused to give up his air of cheerful briskness. He was convicted, but his riches made him bold. When it came right down to it, he had the say-so, and they all knew it.

"Now, let's just talk this thing over quietly among us and



come to some decision that will satisfy everyone," he said blandly. He had put that neatly, he thought.

Jen shot a triumphant glance at Art. They had talked it over in the night, subduing Herbert, who had a bed on the floor of their room, and who kept whimpering that they wouldn't let a fellow sleep, by proclaiming that they had matters to discuss which he could know nothing about. But when Margaret, who was in the next room with her Aunt Hat, had come bounding in and announced that they had better shut up if they did not want Aunt Hat to hear every single word they were saying about her, they had been subdued themselves. So they had not got much farther than Jen's deciding that "Sams" ought to take the old folks if anyone did, for they were certainly best able to afford it. "But they'll get out of it some way, you just see if they don't," she had prophesied bitterly.

"Now don't let them make you agree to anything you don't want," she had warned Art. "I guess we've got something to say in this matter. It concerns us just as much as it does them, and I think the whole relationship ought *all* to decide it equally."

But it was hard to be firm in the sight of Lou's elaborate silver coiffure. Both Jen and Hat—between whom, as those most likely to be "put upon," there was a defensive alliance—had agreed that it would be all right if they had to deal with Sam alone, but that Lou was sure to be at the bottom of the whole thing. Whatever was done would be Her Doings. There she sat, with her large hard bosom plastered with silver and beading, and her maddening air of being only remotely, and by virtue of her own graciousness, connected with the affairs of the Shafer family. Jen raged inwardly. Lou hadn't always been so much. It was Sam who had made the money, not Lou, but of course he would do whatever *She* said.

"Well—suppose we get started," repeated Sam. "Art, you ought to have something to suggest. You preachers usually have something to say," he added with ponderous jocularly.

Art ran his hand slowly over the wrinkles of his waistcoat. He felt Jen's eyes burn into him. She was sitting rigid.

"Well—of course we want to do what's best for the old people," he began, in his ministerial tone, for which he hated himself.

"Oh, of course, certainly," Sam agreed hastily.

"Yes, but just what *is* best for Mother and Father Shafer? That's what we all want to know," Lou put in sweetly.

Jen gave a jerk. "I'm sure that Arthur and I are willing to do anything," she cried touchily, with her air of putting them all in wrong. "I'm sure that no one has been a better son than Arthur, whether anyone realizes it or not."

Lou smiled inscrutably. They all knew that Sam was Mother Shafer's favorite child.

Art flushed. "It's a delicate thing to decide," he murmured.

"Yes, of course," said Sam soothingly. "We're all willing to do whatever is—of course."

Now that the thing was started, he felt at ease. If it wasn't for the way that confounded chair kept sticking into him! He sat, large and amenable, but prosperous. He had the look of hotels and Pullman cars that made them acknowledge his leadership. He had white hair thinning on a rosy skull, and a neat gray mustache.

"Now, as I've figured it out," he went on smoothly, "it's practically impossible for mother and father to spend another winter here alone. Isn't that about the size of it, Hat?"

"I guess so," Hat muttered.

"Yes, of course. We all see that. The place is in frightful condition. They can't keep it up—"

"They can't be expected to," Lou interrupted.

"No, of course they can't. And they really can't take care of themselves much longer—" Sam paused for confirmation.

Jen rocked, her lips tightly pursed together. It was as she had expected. "Sams" were running the whole thing. Art had given right in to them. Sam was doing the talking, but Lou had put him up to it. She was acting so sweet, but Jen knew there was something back of it.

"Well, then," Sam remarked pleasantly, with an air of putting it all impartially before them, "what shall we do?"

Jen broke violently out of her offended silence. "I think those who are best able to take them, ought to," she cried. "I'm sure Arthur and I are willing enough—no one's more willing—but no one realizes the exactions of a minister's life. I just escaped being in the hospital this spring. I couldn't stand one thing more. It's just go, go, go from morning to night. I'm just ready to break down now. No one realizes—"

"No, no. Now, we haven't said anything about anyone's taking the old people," Sam interrupted. "All that remains to be decided."

Jen began to rock again, with her lips tighter. Lou smiled.

Art's face grew red. He felt guiltily that he ought to offer his home. He was ashamed of Jen, and of himself as seeming to agree with her. He would have put his refusal on a moral basis. It was not that he was not glad and willing to have the old people—but there would be so much confusion, it would mean that he would have to ask his people for an addition to the parsonage and that would be difficult just now. New London was his first parish of any size, and certain things were expected of him. His father and mother would not fit in. They would not be happy there—

"Perhaps it won't be necessary for them to leave," Sam suggested pacifically. "Perhaps we can make some arrangement here."

"Have you thought of doing this?" Lou observed smiling.

"Of getting some responsible person to stay here and care for Mother and Father Shafer?"

Jen broke out again. "We thought of it, but I'm sure that even if they aren't my own parents I would never consent to leave them to the care of strangers!"

"Oh, I didn't say strangers, I didn't mention strangers," Lou replied with dignity. "You may be sure that Sam would never, never agree to anything of that kind."

Sam cleared his throat deprecatingly. He was thinking that he wished the women would keep out of this thing and let the men settle it. They could do it reasonably and in half the time. The women were always making a fuss and getting stirred up about every little thing. It was time he was taking the thing into his own hands.

"Now, let's—let's—"

He glared at Lou. Why didn't she speak out and not leave the whole thing to him? She had been concerned enough about it last night. It was so confoundingly hard to make suggestions to this bunch, with Hat never opening her mouth and Jen sitting there just ready to fly off the handle if anyone winked. He couldn't do it all and he wasn't going to. If she couldn't help him she could take the consequences.

Lou rose smilingly to the rescue. "I think we must all appreciate what Hattie has done," she observed with a majestic sweetness that created an instant atmosphere of suspicion. "She has come here to Lenaville every little while and relieved others of us who are more tied by responsibilities. I don't know what we would have done without her. I think we all ought to thank Hattie."

There was a murmur of polite approval. Jen smiled sardonically. She wanted to ask what responsibilities *Lou* had! With her clubs and her dressmakers probably. Whatever they were, they didn't keep her from gadding all over the country—everywhere but to Lenaville.

Hattie moved uncomfortably. She was a bulkily built woman who seemed to overflow the small cane-seated rocking chair which she had hitched into an inconspicuous corner. She had always been considered "not like the rest of them," although in some respects she resembled Art. She was said to have his hair and skin, heavy black hair and skin of a thick dark pallor, but the face which she now turned, with a faint instinct of defensiveness, toward Lou, wore a look of protesting stupidity.

Little Henry, who had been summoned from his feed store in Hobart for the conference, still swung his foot and examined the cracks in his fingertips. No one needed to consider him. He made just enough to get along on. But his air of detachment gave him a pale distinction. It convinced, where Lou's elaborately smiling unconcern aroused distrust.

Lou had not finished. She reached up to adjust a pearl earring that was half sunk in a fold of loose white flesh. "But we must agree," she continued, "that we simply cannot expect Hattie to keep on coming to Lenaville every month or so. We cannot expect that of anyone."

"I ain't going to do it any more. That's all," said Hattie sullenly.

"Of course not. We wouldn't think of asking it of you. Besides, even such excellent care isn't enough now. Father and Mother Shafer need some one with them *all* the time." Lou beamed upon Hattie, whose dull black eyes stared back at her uncomprehendingly. "Now it just occurs to me—why couldn't Hattie and—Henry arrange to spend all their time here?"

"Yes, yes, certainly, why not?" exclaimed Art with an instinctive breath of relief. Then his satisfaction withered slightly under the look of contemptuous triumph that Jen shot at him. So that was what She had been hatching up!

They might have known that a desire to give no trouble to the old folks was not the only reason why "Sams" had stayed at the hotel!

Everyone looked questioningly at Hattie. It was evident that she did not quite take it in. But her look of protest deepened. She glanced hesitatingly at Henry, who was sucking in his lips to the tune of *Marching through Georgia* in a kind of inverted whistle. "Well—I dunno—do you mean live here?" she asked weakly.

Sam plunged briskly in. Now that the thing was out he was himself again. "Yes, that's the idea—live here. Stay right here with them. If the house isn't big enough, why—I'll see to that."

"You mean—move away from Hobart?" said Hat slowly.

"What about Henry's business?" demanded Art. He felt Jen's eyes upon him. "Would that have to be given up?"

Hat's mouth opened slightly.

"Oh, no, not necessarily," Sam said hastily. "You see, Hobart and Lenaville are only a few miles apart—"

"Forty miles!" ejaculated Art.

Sam waved his hand. "Oh—forty miles! What's forty miles these days? Henry could easily run that business at forty miles. Let that boy of his—what's his name? John, Joe?—stay with the business. Be the making of him. Besides, this place is full of possibilities if some one will take hold and make it go. Pa's let it run to seed the last few years. There's a good living for somebody right on this place." Sam, who had a large wholesale business in Omaha, smiled inwardly at all this fuss about a feed store.

"And, of course we intend—Sam and I—to make this entirely a business arrangement," Lou put in blandly.

"Yes, certainly," Sam agreed. "Well, Hat?"

Hat was bewildered. She could not get it straight. She

knew that she had not said anything, but Lou seemed to think that the whole thing was settled. Jen, on the other hand, was looking at her with intense sympathy. Hat was dumb, but the spirit which dwelt in her pale bulk of flesh was stiffening and protesting. She had known that they would try to put something over on her and she was moving cautiously. She had no defense but a mute obstinacy that had got her the name of being as stubborn as a mule.

Art was beginning to regret his first impulsive approval. Every time that he was with Sam and had to witness his older brother's air of riches and assured success, resentment always crept into his heart and finally rendered the companionship intolerable. He had no recourse but to stand up for Henry.

"Perhaps we'd better consult Henry about this," he observed ironically.

All eyes turned for the first time to Henry. He was now swinging his foot as well as sucking in his breath and seemed to find this arrangement far more absorbing than the question of his removal from the feed business. His creed—never stated—was: Let 'em fight it out among themselves. He sniffed slightly but made no answer.

Art was forced to go on. "It seems to me that it's asking a good deal," he stated in his pulpit manner. "It isn't such a light thing to move a family like that even forty miles. And Henry has his business. Why should he be asked to change? A thing like that can't be settled offhand."

"I should say not," cried Jen.

Lou leaned forward and smiled at Art. "I thought we weren't here to decide what was light or easy for ourselves, but what was best for Father and Mother Shafer. If people object to taking them—"

"We don't object to taking them!" cried Jen hotly.

"Oh, pardon me! I thought you said—"

"I said that I thought that those best able to take them ought to. And I say so still."

"Exactly."

"But when it comes to forcing Hat into—"

"Now, now, now, now," said Sam soothingly. "There's no question of forcing. It's entirely for Hat and Henry— Hm!"

He broke off, and the rosy hue of his skull spread downward through his cheeks. Hat's Allie had sidled in through the door. She was a pale snuffly little girl with a wisp of light braided hair. But at sight of her they were all silent. She went up to her mother and began pulling at her skirt and whispering something.

"Whadda you want? Hm?" Hat demanded.

Allie repeated her whisper. "Can't I? *Ma-muh*, can't I?"

"What does she want?" Sam asked.

"Oh, she says she wants to go to the picture show," Hat said shamefacedly.

"Well, Marg'rut's going," Allie persisted.

In spite of Jen's warning glance, Art's hand dove into his pocket. But Sam was ahead of him. He held out a freshly-minted quarter on his plump glistening palm.

"Oh, let her go, let her go," he cried heartily. "Here kiddie, go ahead. That's the place for you. Remember what it's all about and tell your Uncle Sam when you get back."

Allie took the quarter, got out a bashful "*Thang-kew*" to Hat's demand of "What do you say?" and ran from the room. Art surreptitiously slipped his dime back into his pocket.

They all breathed again, but even Lou felt it was impossible to return to the old point. Fate had been personified by Hat's Allie in wrinkled white ribbed stockings and a gingham dress too short for her. Her appearance had mysteriously changed the course of the argument. Sam himself could not switch it back. It was as if the six children of Hat



and Henry, with their demands and clamoring needs, came in with Allie, like the ghosts of the kings in *Macbeth*. Everyone felt that Hat would not come to Lenaville. There was a silence.

"What a difference the motion pictures have made!" Art remarked ponderously.

"She's always wanting to run to them," said Hat apologetically.

Sam fidgeted and tapped his foot. He wanted to get away on the six ten. He wasn't going to spend another night in that hotel, not with Lou along. The vision of a large leather chair at home, in which the hollows were his own, filled him with homesickness. It was a terrible thing for a man to be so uncomfortable.

"Well—suppose we get back to business," he said with determined good-nature. "Now, if Hat thinks she wouldn't like to leave Hobart, of course that's her own affair. But it means that some other plan must be thought of. What do some of the rest of you think about it? Hat, suppose you suggest something."

"You see," Lou explained hastily, "the reason the suggestion about Hattie's staying was made, was because Sam and I both felt that too much of a change wouldn't be good for Mother and Father Shafer. They're pretty old, you know, and it's hard for old people to adjust themselves. They could hardly make an abrupt change at their time of life."

"No, that's true, of course," said Art, trying not to look at his wife.

"No, I think they ought to stay as near the old home as possible," virtuously agreed Jen. "But, of course, for Hat and her family to come here!"

"Perhaps it wouldn't be the best thing," Lou conceded graciously. She felt a sudden sense of unity with Jen. "The place is in a frightful condition."

"Oh, it is! I don't think they ought to be allowed to live here. It's frightful for them."

"And you know it costs to keep it up," Lou reminded them. "Although of course Sam has been glad and willing to do it."

The rest were silent. Sam made an impatient gesture. "Well—Hat?" he insisted.

Hat flushed dully. She could not help feeling that they were blaming her because she had not offered to come to Lenaville. Now they seemed to think that that obliged her to offer something else. She glanced at Henry. He twisted his mouth and looked inscrutable.

"Well—I don't know. You folks better settle it. You will, anyway," she muttered.

"It's hard to know what to do. It's a difficult thing all 'round," said Art with solemn satisfaction. Now that his immediate anxiety was lifting he began to feel the dramatic sense of the occasion. "A difficult thing," he murmured.

"But then these things have to come," said Lou.

"Yes, that's what life is," sighed Jen.

"Well, of course it's hard for them," said Sam with his resolute cheerfulness, "but if you look at it another way it isn't so bad. Suppose we left them alone here through the winter and they fell or got laid up. No one might hear of it for days. They've cared for themselves and others all their lives, now it's time the rest of us are caring for them."

"And they can't possibly be happy here under such conditions," declared Lou, shaking her head. "That kitchen! Some one ought to take hold of it and give it a thorough cleaning. And I should think they'd freeze here in the winter. Bool!" She shuddered, drawing her arms in their transparent black sleeves tight to her body.

"Yes, oh yes, it can't go on much longer," Art affirmed gravely.

"It's a good thing they have children to look after them," cried Jen.

There was a murmur of agreement. The tension was lifting now and a pervading cheerfulness taking its place. Even Jen felt that things were going well. Only Hat looked suspicious and unconvinced.

"But still we haven't quite come to the point," said Sam, genial but bent upon business. "We haven't said just what is to be done. Now I think we're all agreed—"

He broke off again with an impatient exclamation. This time it was Margaret in the doorway, looking at them with an expressionless stare.

"Grandma's crying in there," she observed coldly.

There was a feeling of consternation.

"Oh, pshaw!" muttered Sam impatiently.

"I thought you had gone down town," said Jen, with a suggestion of reproach. "Where is she?"

"In her bedroom."

Margaret shrugged her shoulders and went out.

There was a hush.

"I expect I better go in," said Hat stolidly.

"Yes, yes. All of you girls had better go," Sam proposed nervously. "Hm! Pshaw!"

Lou and Jen, bustling slightly with a sense of dramatic importance that they could not quite subdue, followed Hat out of the room. The men waited, uneasily watching the brown-painted bedroom door with its knob hanging slightly askew. Sounds of an old woman's sobbing, weak and fretful, came through it, and the low soothing tones of the three women.

"Hm!" Sam murmured uncontrollably, "I was afraid we might have a time."

Lou, mysteriously important, appeared in the doorway. She made a sign to Sam with her eyebrows.

"Will you come here a moment?"

"Can't Hat manage it?"

"No. We need you."

Sam followed his wife into the little bedroom. The black walnut bed, the dingy dresser that lurched forward where one castor was missing, the painted wardrobe, the china wash bowl with raised pinkish flowers, the faint smell of bedding and musty carpet—life in the old house rushed blindingly before him.

He stepped awkwardly up to the bed where his mother lay, shaking, and clutching with her brown misshapen fingers at the edge of the patchwork quilt. He tried to pat her gnarled bony shoulder.

"Now, ma! What's all this?"

The old woman tried to jerk away from him, but the influence of Sam, the first born and best beloved, was almost immediate. Her sobs quieted, she fumbled for something with which to wipe her eyes. The sense of shame with which he had been laboring all afternoon caught hold of Sam as he saw the effect that his presence still had. For years he had paid no attention to his mother except to send an occasional check which he could easily spare. Hat had thought of her, worked for her, come to see her every few months in spite of the exactions of poverty and a great brood of children—and yet she would do nothing for Hat and was wax at a word from Sam.

She groped with her hand for his. He put it, plump, pink, silvered with hairs, over her knotted fingers with their split and blackened nails.

"She thinks we're going to do something to her," Hat announced.

"Why—you don't think that, do you, ma?" Sam asked weakly.

He bent down to catch what the old woman whispered—"planning something—"

"Why, what should we be planning?" Jen asked with a warning glance at Sam.

He scowled at her. He felt the pitiful clutch of his mother's fingers on his. An immense urge to get the thing over and done with, and to get away from these jealousies, undercurrents, pettinesses, came over him. He hated the way that he always found himself acting when he was among "the relationship." He wanted to get home.

"Now, ma, let's have this thing out. Will you listen—hm?"

He bent close, drawing from her a faint nod.

"That's right. Of course you will."

Her thin gray hair, streaked with brown, that was always drawn smooth and tight from the broad white parting, was wildly disheveled. The tiny braid that for years she had wound into a hard little knob at the back of her head, was slowly uncoiling like a bit of twisted wire. Sam could see a part of her wrinkled brown cheek drawn up with crying.

"Well, then, you know things can't go on always as they have been. You and pa oughtn't to be left alone this way—it isn't the thing. And there's no reason why you should, when you have children to take care of you."

"That's what I told her," Hat put in, "but she says she don't want anyone taking care of her."

"Oh, now, ma!" This was the thing that Sam dreaded. But he forced his voice to its cheerful sensible tone. "Of course you can take care of yourself, but the time's come now when we ought to do something for you. You've worked hard all your life and now you ought to let some one else do part of it. That's all Hat meant. Isn't that so?"

She looked suddenly up at him. "Tell *them* to go!" she whispered fiercely.

Sam spoke shamefacedly to Lou and Jen. "I guess you girls had better go in the other room a little while, and ma and I will talk this thing out together."

Sam gave a puff of relief when he was alone with his mother. He felt that he could manage her, if only those women would keep their oar out! He bent down close and whispered to her, so eager to get the thing over and convince her, that he convinced himself. At the same time he felt a sweet melancholy affection for her—she was so tiny, withered, silent, so true.

"Now, see here, ma, I don't like to go 'way off to Omaha and leave you and pa here alone. Oh, I know you aren't helpless, but just the same something might happen. Like that fall you had. You might happen to get sick, or pa might, and I tell you it isn't the thing. I don't think you will, but then you might, you know."

"Hat could come," she said resentfully.

"Maybe she could and maybe she couldn't," Sam replied judicially. "One of her children might just happen to be sick at the same time you were, and then where'd you be! Besides, it's hard for Hat to keep coming here every little while. She's got a big family to look after and plenty to do at home, and it isn't always easy to pick up and leave."

The old woman was silent, shrinking away from the moist reassuring pressure of his hand. Dumbness was her only weapon. She felt the struggle between them. Her face grew warily impassive.

Sam went on hastily:

"Now, ma, I think it'd be better all 'round if you and pa would go and stay this winter with Hat. It—"

"You mean leave here! I knew you were trying to drive us out!" Her face broke up again into violent weeping. She clutched at the quilt.

Sam grew suddenly angry. "Drive you out! As if your own

children would drive you out of anywhere! We're trying to do the best thing possible for you, and you make it hard enough! Here I came clear from Omaha—" The sight of his mother, frightened and whimpering, brought him back. "You didn't mean that, of course, ma. But I want you to try and see the thing from a reasonable viewpoint. Of course we want to do the best thing for you, whatever it is."

Her lips quivered uncontrollably, but she managed to whisper: "I don't want to leave here. I've always lived here—all my things is here—"

"I know it, ma, but just for this winter—afterwards we could see—how it worked out!"

He got up suddenly and walked to the window. He could see the lawn, the grass unkempt and withering out under the shaggy trees that grew too thick. The old barn, the dingy chicken yard, the old one-legged chair fallen tipsily under the apple tree— He shivered. He could not leave them here!

"We've always got along," his mother quavered. "I don't want to be beholden to folks as long as I can do for myself."

"You wouldn't need to be. You could do there just the same as you do here." For the moment Sam conceived this to be true. "Only, in case of anything, you'd be where Hat could look after you. No, you'd help Hat a lot more than she would you. Just think of all you could do with the children."

Still the dumb, obstinate look persisted.

"Look here, ma!" Sam exclaimed suddenly. "Would you rather come with me? I said Hat, because I knew Hat was near the old place, and that you'd have the children there—but if you'd rather come with me—"

She looked at him. "No," she said faintly.

"Well, I didn't think you would," Sam said heartily. There had been a sudden rending thought of Lou. "It's so far and all. But if you—now I tell you what I'll do. I'll see

to it that you and pa have your own things at Hat's, if you'd like that better. I don't blame you." He forgot that the definite offer of her home had never been made by Hat. "There can be a room built on if necessary. I'll see to all that. And there you can live, just as snug as you please, much more comfortably than you do here—"

He broke off, for his father's shuffling steps had come to the door. The old man stood in the hallway, looking hesitatingly from his wife to Sam with his dim blue eyes.

"What's ma crying for?" he asked.

He gently put off little Benny's fingers and came into the room.

"Run away, Ben. Grandpa wants to talk to Uncle Sam."

He was a very old man. He had great bowed shoulders, a beard like hoar frost, blue eyes set wide apart with the unfathomable look of the old peasantry. He wore a shapeless brown coat and slippers with tufted red flowers.

He had done many things—farmed, kept a little grocery store, been janitor at the Court House. Now he just potted around his barn and grounds, keeping a pig, a horse, and a few bees and chickens, raising vegetables and a little corn, and living upon these things and the checks Sam sent. He had grown sweeter, vaguer, and more useless with the years. He loved his animals—had a name for each of them—and was happiest of all when he wandered about the yard with little Benny, hunting on the ground for good apples, and singing old songs in his thin, sweet, wavering voice.

"Come in, pa," said Sam impatiently. "Ma and I were just talking about next winter."

The old man stood in the doorway, with that vague, half-frightened look in his eyes.

"I guess I better get my cap," he said uncertainly. "Head's always chilly without. Do you know where the durned thing's gone, ma?"



"I see it a little bit ago. Ain't it on top of the wardrobe?" she asked in a muffled voice from the pillow.

"Oh, yes. How in time did it get up there?" The old man, who had been peering at the bed and the window panes, got down the skull cap of black cambric and fitted it carefully over his gray head.

Sam waited nervously. The old man was much blinder than he had been when Sam last saw him, six years ago. It was impossible, unsafe, to leave him alone with the old place through the long cold winter.

"What was you sayin', Sam?"

"We were talking about next winter, pa," Sam said in his most reasonable tones. "Now, I don't think you folks ought to try to stay here by yourselves and run this great place. There's no sense to it. It's hard on you, isn't it?"

"Well, I—I don't—" The old man frowned uncertainly.

"They want us to go to Hat's," his wife said in a low trembling voice.

"Why, you mean—visit? I don't know's I care to—"

"He means stay there. They're all trying to make us."

Sam gave an impatient twist. "I don't like the idea of your staying here another long hard winter. You'd have company at Hat's and be well taken care of, and—well, we'd feel better about it all 'round."

Pa was staring out of the window at the gnarled purplish limbs of the old apple tree. Comprehension was slowly and visibly dawning in his eyes.

"Why, I'd hate awful to leave the place," he said uncertainly, with a glance at his wife. "I don't know, we been here so long, it'd be awful hard to break away. I don't know what'd become of the beasts—they've got used to me—I wouldn't like to think of anybody else havin' 'em. Peter's been real lame, the last year or so. I've kinda looked after him. I don't know, Sam—. Ma, whadda you say?"

"I don't say. They've done the saying. They fixed it among 'em," she finished bitterly.

Then she reached out passionately for Sam's hand.

"Sam, I ain't sayin' it about you. I don't want to go against what you want. You been so good to us, sendin' us money and all. But I wouldn't do it for the others. And I—you gotta let me take what I want with me!" she cried suddenly and vehemently. "I'm gona have my own things. I ain't gona use Hat's."

"Yes, yes, ma. Of course you can take whatever you want. Take everything in the house if you want it. I'll fix all that." Sam almost laughed in a rush of relief, glad to be, in some manner, the generous provider that he loved to be. He only half comprehended that his attitude of displeasure, of impatience, had been enough to make his mother throw to the winds her independence, her home, all the things that she cherished. She had never been able to "stand against" Sam.

"I'll leave you and pa to talk it over by yourselves," he conceded heartily. "You just see if you don't think it's the best thing. You just talk about it a little."

He got out of the room as fast as he could and let out a long breath of relief. He detested what he called "times." But he had learned in business to go through with them and finish them, and then throw them off.

The others had gone outdoors. Through the partly open door, he could see them moving about the lawn looking for apples in the long shiny grass. He knew how he would appear unconcernedly among them and say cheerfully, in an offhand way, "Well! I guess that's settled."

But he lingered for a moment in the parlor and his exhilaration evaporated. He remembered that he would have to tell Hat how easily he had made free of her home. Even

promised to build on a room. And had agreed to let ma take her things—

Those things were all about him now. He could not look at the pampas grass sticking up absurd and stiff from the blue-painted vase. The elaborate lace curtains tied back with cords of red plush, the sea shell beside the door, the plants, the ingrain carpet, musty-smelling, and patterned with great sprawling cornucopias of roses—

“Oh, pshaw!” he muttered.

He turned uncertainly toward the bedroom door from which he could hear a low murmur. In the intervals the eight-day clock ticked loudly in the kitchen.

No. It was over and done with. He shrugged his shoulders vigorously and put it from him.

It was strange how people seemed to take root in a place. He should think anyone would be glad to leave this run-down, miserable spot. See how the steps were coming apart!

After all, he had to pay the bills and he was entitled to some voice in the matter.

But it was too bad that the way of life was as it was.

As he went out of the house he realized that he could take the six ten as he desired. There were arrangements to make but he could hustle them through in no time if he had to.

He smiled sardonically as he saw Jen's tense listening back.

Lord! He would be glad to get out of that hotel and back to his own home again.



## MAN'S DAY<sup>1</sup>

BY FREDERICK SCRIBNER

*It didn't make much difference if he stayed or went. He was a bum either way. That was one way of looking at it. Another way of looking at it was he would at least not be bumming on the same person all the time. . . . Jesus, you give a woman a job and let the man be out of work and she thinks she's a lord. . . .*

THEY awoke about the same time, breathed yawns into the still cold, and stared across the pillows in early morning distrust before full consciousness. Then he tasted his mouth wryly, bent his lips to a stiff grin, and put his arm across her shoulders. "Love me, Annie?" he mumbled. Even this early she made a grimace; she preferred Anne, but she had given up scolding Bert about it. He kissed her, and the kiss made a loud, wet smack. He didn't have much technique half asleep.

For a moment they lay still, listening to the vibrant clicks of the Big Ben on the walnut bureau, then Annie moved determinedly to get out of bed. She swung her legs quickly over the edge and dropped her toes into black mules; switching into her dressing gown, she closed the window hurriedly.

Bert looked after her as she left the room, wide awake himself now, though his lids sagged. He muttered, "Workin'

<sup>1</sup> From *Story Magazine*, October, 1933. Reprinted by permission of *Story Magazine*.

woman. Full of business." Pulling the covers up over his shoulders, he closed his eyes; but it was no use trying to sleep now that he had waked enough to realize that Annie was going to work and he wasn't. The dull gray consciousness of it drifted over him as it had every morning for eight months, and it made him uneasy and restless and he rubbed his feet together petulantly. He thought: Well, I ought to get up and help get the breakfast. He could hear Annie gargling and brushing out in the bathroom. He moved his hips over to the edge of the bed and stuck one foot out of the covers. It was cold. Withdrawing his foot he let himself relax again into the softness of the mattress; staring at the white ceiling made his eyes heavy, and he dozed. In the old days he would have thought how cold it was, but he would have got up anyway because he had to; now he didn't know whether he had to or not. He thought how cold it was and that it was hard on Annie to go out this early, pretty hard on a girl. As for himself, he considered the day ahead with repulsion, counting the minute things he had to do as their names shifted into his mind: wash the dishes and turn the bacon grease into the can because they saved it, God knew why; make the bed; clean the place; shop with all the dowdy women at the A & P; get lunch; wash the dishes; and sit around and listen to the radio, poke around and sit around.

Eight months ago he hadn't minded so much because Annie had got work and they had said they were lucky. Then he began to get sore at Annie once in a while for acting as if she wore the pants, and acting as if she were doing him a big favor. Then he began to feel tired all the time, though he knew he didn't do much. The muscles of his back ached and his legs got tired when he stood fumbling with the dishes. He thought maybe it was the endless frittering around, but he really didn't know what made him get so tired. He only knew, right now, that spending all day in

the house doing a woman's work was no day for a man. It didn't seem, feeling as logy as he did, he'd ever be any good again handling marble even if he got a chance.

Annie, in a pink slip, hurried into the room, one hand clutching a towel, and got a comb from the dresser top. She hurried back again, her steps determined, and Bert could feel antagonism from her tense, going-to-work body.

Groaning, he got up. "Fulla business. Fulla business," he said, stiff-lipped. His pajama strings were dangling, and he tied them up elaborately. Then he got into his bathrobe and shuffled into the kitchen and hooked up the percolator. Sitting down on a kitchen chair, he yawned and scratched his head. He reached for a box of Corn Toasties on the kitchen shelf and shook some into two cereal dishes on the laid table. He glanced at the toaster on the shelf, considered, then bawled suddenly, "Hey, Annie! You want toast?" He thought sourly: sometimes she does, sometimes she doesn't.

Annie appeared in the kitchen doorway in her neat office black, her forehead pulled into a frown. Her voice had an irritated edge; she said, "Bert, do you have to shout the roof off?"

Bert's face got a little red. "I didn't shout the roof off," he said; then quickly, "Listen, do you want some toast?"

She shook her head coolly and walked to the stove and turned on the gas for the eggs. Her manner roused Bert—he could feel himself getting sore, yet he didn't want to start anything this morning, and he tried to keep his resentment down. Restraint tightening his throat, he said, "All right, then. Sit down. Here's your cereal all ready." But he couldn't control it. "Hell! you don't have to get so hot."

"I'm not." She sat down and poured milk into her cereal and raised her eyebrows in the detached way he disliked. "It's too bad to wake up all the neighbors, that's all."

Bert leaned forward on his elbows, and his voice rose with his anger. "I only asked you a civil question."

"What did you get up for? You'd better stay in bed if you got to yell around here in the morning."

For a second Bert had a nervous impulse to hit her; he yelled, "What did I get up for! God, that's a hot one! First you crab because I lay in bed and you do the work, then you crab because I get up and get breakfast." Shoving his chair back, he stood up.

"I'd rather get my own than have you hollerin' all over the house," Annie said. She sipped at her coffee, her little finger crooked out.

Bert roared, "O.K.! You'll have a chance!" He stumped out of the kitchen into the bedroom and crawled under the covers. Thrashing around, he tried to think that he wanted to get comfortable before he went off for a good long snooze. . . . First she crabs when I lay in bed, then she crabs when I get up and get breakfast, he thought. Well, she can get her own. What if I was a little loud? What of it? That's no cause to get mad. You'd think she was a lord. Jesus, you give a woman a job and let the man be out of work, then she thinks she's a lord.

He rolled to his right side, yanked the clothes under his chin and shut his eyes. He could hear Annie in the kitchen now. Her heels clicked "going to work" emphatically across the kitchen floor. He wondered if she'd come in. When he stayed in bed in the morning, she usually came in to tell him what she wanted for lunch and to kiss him good-bye. She usually came in.

The kitchen door slammed and for a minute Bert was miserable— "Aw, Annie. Aw, honey. Why didn't cha come in. You know I didn't mean nothin', honey." He twisted around and the bed was a mess of wrinkled clothes and he

felt sick and empty. Then his resentment came up again. "Anyone would think she wore the pants around here the way she snorts around! Maybe she thinks I love this life, maybe she thinks I have a swell time sitting around on my backside like an old woman while she brings home the gravy. Sure, what a grand time I have." He lay still for a moment and felt the warm and righteous anger deserting him until it had all gone, and the quiet of the room enclosed him in his own emptiness; "Aw, hell," he muttered limply.

Hungry, now, he got up, slipped out of his pajamas, and stood a moment looking down at the new soft inch of girth he had put on his belly. He was getting a paunch like a timekeeper. He swore suddenly and plunged his fist into his middle, tensing his stomach muscles. You didn't get soft sacking marble around, setting marble and setting tile. And now here he was getting a belly and getting softer by the hour. Ought to take some exercise. Ought to—

Moving slowly he got his breakfast and ate gloomily, trying to recall something he had to do. He ought to drop in on the employment agency to see if anything had come up; but it wasn't that that he was trying to remember. It was something important—something— Hell! today was a big day. He had to hurry. The election was today. My God, that was funny he should forget the election, God knows he had been waiting for it long enough and reading all the stuff in the papers, but Annie had been so snippy it hadn't come up in his mind, it just hadn't come up in his mind. Well, today was the big day, and he suddenly felt more energy in his bones than he had for months. He finished his breakfast hurriedly.

As he banged the dishes rapidly through hot water, Bert thought that the result of the election would probably mean beer, and people would drink beer which was taxed, and that would lower other taxes, then business would pick up,



then maybe he could get a job. If Roosevelt got in, a new man like that, good times might come back soon. Not that Bert thought so much of Roosevelt; he had seen him making a speech in a newsreel, and he had said to Annie doubtfully, "Looks like a pretty smooth gent." He didn't think so much of Hoover either.

Bert finished drying the dishes, threw up the blankets on the bed, and smoothed them swiftly. He felt good. He knew how he was going to vote all right, and he mulled over the reasons he had been keeping in mind, getting them in orderly fashion so that he could call them up at any time, then he put them away and let the decision, "Well, I'm going to vote Democratic, what the hell," rest uppermost in his mind.

Hurrying into the bathroom, he looked into the mirror to see if he needed a shave. He peered at the reflection of his round, heavily molded face and ran his fingernails down his cheeks, feeling the tiny bristles prick the skin under the nails; it wasn't bad. It was 9:30 and he had better rush if he didn't want to wait all day at the polls. He rubbed some powder into the coming darkness of the day's beard and then scrubbed his face with a towel.

In the hall he got into his coat and buttoned it quickly. He couldn't remember when he had been in such a hurry. He was pleased this was election day. It gave him something definite to do.

Bert walked down the dead end side-street to Maple Avenue, where a vista of partially denuded trees, clusters of parked automobiles, and leaf-lined curbs lay before him in gray distinctness. The air had an electric tingle for him, an electricity exuded by his own emotional tension. At an iron lamp post, as he stopped to light a cigarette, a brief memory of the morning came to him, and he thought tolerantly, "Annie is a sweet kid in a lot of ways."

This cool day everything had a cut, hammered look, brittle and sharp as a lone pine on a hill. Bert, his eyes jolted out of the commonly dull perception of the unemployed man, felt suddenly aware and wise about everything he saw. Two days ago he had been down town, yet everything seemed changed by a new crispness and a new meaning. He passed the red brick fire station with its four open portals, where several firemen loafed in chairs, picking their teeth, and he thought that fire stations meant a lot of taxes and probably there could be a lot of slashing done there. Then in a quick succession he passed a hardware store, Jim's lunch, a chestnut roaster, a fruit and fish market, and a cheap clothing store flaunting giant red bankruptcy signs. All the stores were empty, Bert noticed.

At the end of the block Bert waited for traffic and stepped closely behind the last car, a truck loaded with rattling ginger ale bottles, and onto the next sidewalk. From a radio and washing machine shop a tenor voice blared forth, "Would God I were a ten-duh ap-pul blossom" to the frosty air, and the sound rushed into the swift hurrying of tires over a loose sewer cover, and men and women were thick on the streets and their chattering was lost among the ur-chins' gritting roller skates and honks and blats. The day was crystal clear. Bert saw some headlines, "Nation goes to Polls." That was right, the whole nation; people out in California, South Dakota, and Arkansas were doing what he was doing right now, everyone doing the same thing at the same time. Election was a mighty big thing if you thought of it like that.

The polls for Bert's ward, the third, were in the Eagles' Aerie on East Newton Street and Bert turned left when he came to the center of the town. The sidewalks began to be filled with men who had voted and candy-sellers and beggars. As Bert neared the Aerie he avoided rather nervously

several bucolic fellows who were passing out handbills and candidates' cards. He knew how he was going to vote. One thin man, a straggly knitted tie blowing around his neck, stepped in front of him and thrust a card into his hand. Involuntarily he looked down at it. It was mottled brown and white, round, a different shape from most of the cards; it said, "*Vote Straight Socialist.*" Bert let it drop out of his fingers. There were a lot of white handbills, candidates' pictures, and brown cards on the sidewalks, dirty from the shuffling feet.

It was fairly early yet, and Bert hurried inside the drafty, high ceilinged hall and glanced around a little feverishly to find his place in line. His name, Johnson, belonged in the F to M group and he joined it and waited. He was breathing hard from walking so rapidly through the streets, and he removed his hat to wipe his sweating forehead. His heart was thumping; he hadn't realized he had been walking so fast.

Placing his hat back on his head at an angle, he looked around, feeling ready to say hello if there was anyone he knew. There were two cops swelling around, big, great coated, and secure in their municipal jobs, and some beery-faced old men wearing white "Moderator" buttons. A monstrous lady politician, with a black band drawn tightly around the sagging cords of her neck, jounced by toward a desk at the end of the hall, carrying a sheaf of papers.

The sight of her made Bert think that he should have tried to get an election job and get paid well for running around looking like God Almighty. But probably he would have had to talk to some party man, and this year he felt complicated about parties—didn't feel that he belonged to any; anyway, he hadn't the knack of getting in with people and making a soft berth for himself out of their interest the way some men had. He had always been independent and

scornful of moochers of any kind. He had been earning \$66 a week with the Philbrook Tile Company, then he had been cut to \$45 and, a month later, let out. He hadn't had time to accustom himself to a gradual change. If Annie hadn't got her stenographer's job he didn't know where they'd be now. Bert shifted his feet as the waiting line moved up.

A thin, sandy-haired man about thirty-five approached from behind, clapped Bert on the shoulder jovially, and exclaimed, "Where you been hidin' out, Bert?"

Bert turned, relieved to have someone to talk to, especially Jim Watson. He laughed, and said, "All us suckers that got bit have got to come out of hidin' for the election, Jim." His grin deepened as he thought that maybe Philbrook had a new contract in, would want to push the work right away. Jim would know about that. Shaking hands gladly, he said, "Say, Jim, do you know if Philbrook has anything new on the fire?" For a minute, the way he looked, Bert thought maybe there was something new, but Jim shook his head. "No. No, Bert. I tell you the tile business is as bad as any to be in right now. There's no building going on to amount to anything."

"What about the Baptists' Church they are redoing?"

Jim guffawed. "Jesus, don't make me laugh. You know what they used?"

"No."

"Linoleum! Lin-ol-ee-um! Even the wash-rooms. And a cheap grade at that. I was in there with Mr. Schwartz, you know he got the decorating contract. It don't look too bad."

The line had moved up so that Bert was quite near the four clerks who were checking off voters. Bert said, "You voted, Jim?"

"Yeh. Sure, I voted. What do you think'll be the outcome, Bert. Think Hoover will—?"

"Say, do you?" Bert interrupted; he wrinkled his forehead as if considering. "What I think is, Roosevelt will get in. You take out in the Middle West, you know they say people out there are harder hit than we are, especially those farmers. Let me tell you those people are fed up with Hoover!" Expressing his opinion about it made Bert excited. He began to feel a little nervous, too, about the process of voting, now that he was nearing the table, and his eyes swerved from Jim to the green curtains of the voting booths, and he watched a man slide open a curtain and pull it to again. To vote the straight Democratic ticket you just pulled the top lever. Better not monkey with any split ticket, although there were one or two Republicans he would like to see win on the Connecticut ballot.

Jim was going. He said, "See you later, Bert."

Bert's thoughts recoiled from the election to job-hunting, and he reached out and caught Jim's sleeve, his voice suddenly husky, "Jim, I think I'll go up and see Philbrook this afternoon. Maybe something has come in. What do you think?" He cleared his throat nervously.

Jim's sallow face had lines of doubt, but he saw Bert was worried and he didn't want to destroy his hopes. He said, "We-ell, maybe. Maybe there is. I don't know. I haven't seen any of his men for quite a few days. Wouldn't do no harm to try." His tone took on sudden heartiness. "Why, yes! Likely as not he may have something new." He paused, then added awkwardly, "Well, I gotta be goin'."

Bert looked after Jim, thinking about him, and about working. Jim did frescoing and fine decorating and had work about half the time.

Well, maybe Philbrook did have something new. Bert had a feeling he might get a job, and the feeling spread through him and made him take a long breath. He'd like

to get his hands on some real man's job. Felt just like work—"Sa-ay! Move up, move up!" The clerk scowled at Bert, standing with a three foot space between him and the table. It was his turn.

Starting sheepishly, Bert moved to the desk.

"Name?" snapped the clerk.

"Albert Johnson."

"Johnson," the clerk ran a spatula thumbnail down the white page, "Johnson, Johnson, Johnson, Johnson," ran it back again, turned the page over, "Johnson—here's a Fred Johnson, that ain't you, is it?—Johnson, George; Johnson, Harry—say, what's your address?"

"Eighteen Brickly Place."

"I don't see your name here."

Bert leaned over the table tensely, craning his neck around to see the book. "It ought to be there," he said, feeling that his voice lacked conviction. He began to feel tired; the calves of his legs ached.

"I don't see it." The clerk ran his thumb down the list again—across, down. "It ain't here." He sounded as if he thought Bert wasn't a voter.

"Listen, I'm a registered voter here, Albert Johnson, Eighteen Brickly Place. It ought to be there."

"You a new voter?"

"I been on the list six years."

"Don't see it."

"Look back on that other page, that first page," Bert said; he thought that the clerk was bluffing him because he hadn't moved up. The man behind Bert was getting impatient; he began to make sighing noises through his teeth. The clerk made a swift, last perusal of the page and looked up. He said rapidly, "I tell you what you do, look, we're holding up the line here, go down to that desk at the end of the

hall and ask them if they can find your name. I can't find it. All right, next."

"Say, I'll lose my place in line!"

"Can't be helped if I can't find your name, can it? All right, next, whatsaname?"

Bert was shunted from the line by the pressure behind him, and his fingers left the edge of the high table reluctantly. For a moment, standing outside the railing, he felt dazed. The smoke and the dim hum and shuffle of people and the clack-clack of the booth curtains beat upon his brain; all his morning vigor flowed and drained out of him, leaving him limp and inert, waiting for strength. It came trickling back as he focussed on the dirty trick the clerk had played on him. Eight months ago he wouldn't have let a dumb little snipe like that get away with such stuff. Why, he would have leaned over the table and smacked him! The dirty little snipe! He was sore; he was damned sore and he was going to vote now if he had to tear the place apart with his bare hands.

Striding to the rear of the hall, he came to the table and rapped his knuckles on it sharply. "Say!" he began, then stopped. Presiding at the table was a white-haired old lady wearing glasses and an earphone. Bert felt helpless. He waved his arms and dropped them. Then he half shouted at her, explaining rapidly and grinding his fists in the desk. Surprisingly, she found his name almost at once and told him to get a moderator to retrieve his place in line. Turning away Bert stalked back to the front of the hall, found a moderator, and voted, yanking the top lever savagely.

He forced his way out of the hall through the increasing crowd. His feet shuffled through handbills, sample votes, around cripples' chairs, out of the election district into the ordinary busyness of the principal street.

Bert felt good now. The excitement had let down but he felt good just the same. He had a feeling that he had done all he could do, and now he was all washed up and he could sit back and watch the results. He had an idea the results would be good. This Roosevelt no doubt was a good man. No doubt he was an excellent man. Bert had a real feeling of satisfaction and hope. He felt much better than he did on most days, and somehow he had an idea he might fall into something if he went up to Philbrook's today.

Coming into the town square, Bert noticed the heavy noontime traffic and he suddenly realized how much time it had taken him to vote. He looked at his watch; it was quarter to twelve. He was supposed to get Annie's lunch ready at this time. She rode home every day with Grace Pearson, got there about 12:10. It was too late to get any meat to cook because she only had an hour out. They could eat the rest of the cold cuts in the ice chest—but she liked a hot lunch. . . . Bert felt concerned because Annie had been so mad that morning.

Well, what of it, she could wait for once and go without a hot lunch. Election day only came once every four years and a man had to tend out on a thing like that, especially these times.

But he hurried, thinking he might get there before she did and start things going. He passed the clamorous furniture store, fruit and fish market, Jim's Lunch, the fire station, but he didn't think anything about them now. He was intent on arriving home before Annie.

Fifteen minutes later Bert turned off Maple Avenue into Brickly Place. He glanced at his watch and quickened his stride. Breathing hard, he came to a gray clapboarded house with a small turret on one side and upper and lower front porches.



He trotted up the cracked concrete walk, opened the first door on the porch and ran up the narrow carpeted stairs. He and Annie had the second-floor tenement; a living-dining room, bedroom, bath and kitchen. As soon as Bert reached the top of the stairs he knew Annie was in because the apartment door was open a crack. He groaned a little, out loud, because the snippy way Annie had acted that morning she might be still sore, and not having a ready lunch would make her worse. Bert was anxious to patch it up, tell her about voting, and also tell her that he was going up to see Philbrook after lunch. He wanted to give her the same feeling he had, deep down, that he'd be a busy man soon with a good job, at least a fairly good job. The more Bert thought about a job the less he remembered how Jim Watson had looked and acted. He remembered only the last thing Jim said.

He pushed open the door and went in. Taking off his coat in the hall, he peeked into the living room, but it was empty. He called, "Annie!" then walked through the hall and opened the bedroom door. She was lying on the bed, one leg drawn up underneath the other, gazing at the window. She turned her head slightly as he came in.

Bert said, "You been here long, Annie? I had to spend most of the morning voting. I just got back." He sat down on the bed beside her and leaned back on one elbow. He couldn't tell yet how she felt or whether she was over the morning flurry. Her face had no expression.

"You did?" she said. The words came out rounded and careful, as if she had tasted something which set her tongue on edge.

"Say, Annie, I'm sorry about your lunch. I got held up down at the polls by this dumb clerk. The dumb snipe couldn't find my name. I'll go out and rustle something up for you now." Bert paused expecting her to say something.

He would have liked to have had it all straight between them at once, so that he could go on and tell her about voting, and what Jim said, and about going to the Tile Company to try again that afternoon.

Annie yawned a little, patting her mouth with her hand. She sat up. "I'm not so hungry," she said. "I guess I'll make myself a peanut-butter sandwich and have a little coffee." Her brown hair was pressed against the back of her head where she had been lying down. She was conscious of it and began fluffing it out with her hand.

"Oh, well," Bert said, "you'd ought to have more than that, Annie. You need more than that on your stomach, working all the afternoon. Want me to warm up them beans?" He got off the bed and stood by the door. "Sure, sure!" he said heartily. "You let me warm up them beans and you get the sandwiches if you want."

"I don't care," she said; "that's all right." Without looking at him she got off the bed and walked over to the bureau and began fussing with her hair in front of the mirror.

In the kitchen Bert opened the can, twisting and jerking at the can-opener. He wondered what was griping Annie. She didn't act sore about that morning. She just acted stiff and stand-offish. Something was griping her, he knew, because he didn't feel right with her. Sometimes she got calm like that to cover up a big mad-on. Women were funny as hell. As long as he had been married to Annie, four years, sometimes he couldn't make her out. Bert poured the beans into the frying pan and put them on the gas. Annie came into the kitchen and went to the cupboard for the peanut butter.

"Is Grace going to pick you up on the way back?" asked Bert.

"She always does, doesn't she?" said Annie.

"Well, a lot of people are going to vote this noon. I thought maybe she was going to vote, thought maybe that would change her plans."

"Well, she isn't so crazy about waiting in line for a couple of hours to cast a measly vote that won't make any difference anyway, as you are."

Bert understood now that she had been calm in the bedroom to cover up a big mad-on. He wanted to quit fighting and tell her about Jim Watson and about his hunch that he might get a job. You take it if he got something to do, Annie could stop working, then they'd be the same as before and get along O.K. Get along fine.

He moved over to Annie and put his arms around her waist. She tried to switch away. Bert said, "Listen, sweetheart, you don't have to get sore. I been down and voted this morning and it took me longer than I expected on account of this damned snipe couldn't find my name, else I would have had your lunch all ready for you. Come on, give me a kiss." He pulled her up to him and landed a kiss on her cheek. Leaning stiffly back from the waist, so that he could feel her hip bones pressing into him, she pushed at him with her hands and got out of his arms.

"I should have thought you'd have let it go and come home when you saw you were going to be late," Annie said. She moved over to the cupboards and began setting up the kitchen table, her hands moving to and fro swiftly with the cups and knives. "One vote don't make any difference," she added.

Bert drew a pack of Luckies out of his pocket and took out a cigarette and lighted it; he tried to act as though their argument was all over, but he knew it was just beginning. Underneath his casualness, his body was tense and he waited for Annie to spring whatever she was going to spring. Puff-

ing his cigarette, he said, "Well, a man feels like he has to do these things, Annie. What if everyone felt that way, that one vote don't amount to much? These times you got to vote. You can't end a depression sitting back on your heels. That's all we can do is vote," he paused, his brow furrowed; "maybe later we might have to do something else. This country is in a tough condition. Seems to me sometimes it wouldn't take much to start a revolution. These Hunger Marchers are a bad sign."

Bert slid two chairs up to the table, scraped some beans from the frying pan into each plate, and they sat down to eat. Annie poured out the coffee, keeping her eyes averted from Bert.

"It don't do any good to talk," she said; her voice had the same bitter edge. She raised her cup to her lips, balanced it, and burst out, "I'd hate to think what would have been said to me if I hadn't had your lunch ready when you were working! Seems to me that might be the least you could do, take care of this end of it, while I'm out earning the money!" Two spots of red showed in her cheeks.

"Why, I wouldn't have said anything to you, honey."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't!"

"Say, I wouldn't have said anything to you on election day if you were out of the house and no lunch ready because you voted."

"Listen, I'm working hard to hold this job down, and when I come home at noon to an empty house and no food ready it seems to me it isn't worth it! There'd be the same President even if you didn't vote!"

Chewing on a mouthful of beans, Bert looked at Annie; he said, "Well, a man has to cast his ballot! I told you I was sorry about your lunch." He tried to shift the talk. "I saw Jim Watson down at the polls. We were talking. He seemed

to think Philbrook might have something new in. I'm going up there this afternoon to see about a job."

Annie laughed shortly. "That's a good one," she said. "Philbrook's gone out of business."

Bert wiped his lips with a napkin, then bore down hard with his wrists on the edge of the table. He said weakly, "What do you mean Philbrook's gone out of business?"

"He filed bankruptcy papers yesterday. I was going to tell you but it slipped my mind."

"Say, listen, Philbrook's is a big company."

"The bigger they are the harder they fall. He's broke. Not many people know about it, but I heard Mr. Beales talking about it yesterday. That's what Mr. Beales said, 'The bigger they are the harder they fall.' From what I heard Mr. Beales say Philbrook took a big fall. He's even losing his big stone house up on Indian Point. So there isn't any chance for you there."

Bert was crestfallen. "Say, that's a shame," he said; he had stopped eating. "It was funny, I had an idea he would have a job for me this afternoon, or there was something he could get me to do."

"Well, he can't now."

"No," said Bert. "No, I guess he can't." He toyed with the spoons, staring down at them, then looked up, and laughed. "Just the same, you know I got a hunch—well, I got a feeling this morning, voting and talking with Jim Watson like that, that I'd get a job soon. Listen, Annie, how much you wanna bet I get me a job this week!" Bert felt gay suddenly because of the hope that the morning had given him.

Annie stood up; her face was pallid, and her lips moved jerkily. "I don't see why you can't! You're a big and able-bodied man! You sit there and grin and tell about hunches

about getting a job! Good God, why don't you! I don't see many able-bodied men like you hanging around except these half-baked Poles and Eytalians."

Bert's grin faded into a sober scowl. He got up too. "Aw, say, Annie, you know I hung out at the Employment Agency and Philbrook's office until I nearly wore out the carpets. They finally told me they'd drop me a line if—"

Annie turned away and left the kitchen, Bert at her heels. In the hall, as she put on her coat, she said, "I notice Grace Pearson's brother got something to do after he got let out. You could do the same if you wanted."

"Sure! Sure!" Bert flared at the sore spot. "How'd he get it! How'd he get it! By sucking around those politicians down to town hall until he got Old Man Connors to make him attendant in that little jerk museum that they already got one attendant don't do nothing but stand around picking his behind, that's how he got it. Now, listen here, Annie, I told you once I won't suck around no politician for nothing. I got a little self-respect left. It wouldn't be so bad except it's Connors and I hate his foot tracks!"

Annie swung into her coat, pressed down the crown of her felt turban. Her long oval face shone with pallor. She didn't say anything. She darted a queer glance at Bert, opened the door and walked out, leaving it for him to close.

Bert went into the living room and sat down in the big overstuffed easy chair near the radio. From habit he turned the radio switch on and twirled the knobs until jazz music dripped through the screen. He turned the volume lower and slumped into the chair and rubbed his chin with his fingers.

His face was dull and expressionless. The music dipped and ran and battered at drums and swung into choruses, and the announcer came on. Then more music. Bert looked

around the room slowly, his gaze pausing at the picture of Rheims Cathedral, the hard-cushioned "occasional" chair, the dark parlor table, and resting finally, on the brightly colored cushions on the divan. He and Annie had done a lot of shopping around to get their furniture cheap. They had got married one February and they had gone down to New York together to shop during the February sales. They had walked a lot, and Bert could picture Annie, the way she had been, her mouth and cheeks red, and strands of her curled brown hair whipping from under her hat in the wind. He had wanted to kiss her and had kept pressing her arm with his hand and every time he did that she would turn and flash a smile at him. He could remember how she looked, four years ago.

For half an hour Bert sat in the easy chair, not listening consciously to the swing of the jazz music, mulling over what Annie had said and how she had looked. She said he ought to get a job being an able-bodied man. . . . Bert stirred resentfully. . . . Jesus, you give a woman a job and let the man be out of work, then she thinks she's a lord, she thinks she's God Almighty! . . . He stared around the room again, at all the furniture, and suddenly his face worked. The pent-up misery of eight months' loafing and being dependent on Annie welled up in his chest and pushed at his eyes. He began to cry. The tears dropped off his cheek bones and splashed onto his shirt. He tried to control his face and it became lugubrious and long and wrinkled like a hound's face. His lips still drawn down at the corners, he fumbled for his cigarettes and lighted one with shaking fingers. He inhaled. His face stopped working and he got calmer.

It didn't make much difference if he stayed or went. He was a bum either way. That was one way of looking at it. Another way of looking at it was if he went he would at least not be bumming on the same person all the time. He would

at least be dividing it up on different people. The way Annie acted about it he wouldn't be feeling all the time like a bum on her, at least. He was the type of man that had to be watching out for himself. That was what the trouble was with him, he had got so he was depending too much on other things, like on what Jim Watson said, and what Annie said, and on the election. He guessed that was what made him ache so. That was what made his legs ache so, by God. Looking at it that way, leaving would be a good thing.

The radio was still on. Somebody was talking advertising. Bert lifted himself out of the chair on the heels of his hands and walked stiffly into the bedroom. From the closet he threw out a black Boston bag. He opened a bureau drawer, pawed out shirts, ties and underwear and stuffed them into the bag. He went next into the bathroom, and picked up his toilet articles, so that both hands were stuffed full of a shaving brush, razor, razor blades, shaving cream, tooth paste, tooth brush, and a bottle with only the dregs of Lilac Water. He took the stuff into the bedroom and dropped it on top of the shirts and covered it with two big towels. Then he clicked the bag shut and straightened.

The radio was still going. This was a funny skit; there were two comedians cracking jokes. One had a high skinny voice.

Lifting the bag, Bert walked with it into the hall. While he was putting on his coat and hat he cleared his throat rumblingly two or three times. Coming to the archway of the living room again, he stood there a minute before he opened the door. He didn't look around. He just looked at the radio and listened to the two comedians cracking jokes.





## MOTHER TO DINNER<sup>1</sup>

BY TESS SLESINGER

*She was weary already with the nervous effort she would make to bring Gerald and her mother close to each other, with her own struggle to remain equally close to both of them, simultaneous with her desperate attempt to conceal from each the affection she felt for the other.*

KATHERINE BENJAMIN, who had been Katherine Jastrow for something less than a year, said Goodafternoon to the groceryman and, stooping to the counter, gathered two large and unwieldy packages close to her body, balancing one elbow on her hip so that the hand, crawling to the top, could hold sternly separate the bottle of milk from the package of Best Eggs. The thin, one-eyed errand boy who sprawled on an empty packing-box near the door leaped to his feet and opened it with a flourish and a "hot, isn't it?" And sliding past him, curving her body to make a nest for the projecting bundle, she heard the screen door swing lightly closed behind her, flutter against the wood frame in a series of gently diminishing taps.

Why did one say Goodafternoon instead of Good-bye to tradesmen and teachers, she wondered, following her packages as they bobbed evenly down the street before her, recalling (as she adjusted her gait to her burden) countless

<sup>1</sup> From *Time: The Present* by Tess Slesinger (New York, Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1935). Reprinted by courtesy of the author.

times when she had waited, in middies and broad sailor hats, for her mother's comforting "Goodmorning, Mr. Schmidt," and Mr. Schmidt's answering "Goodmorning, Mrs. Benjamin, goodmorning, I'm sure." And now Katherine, no longer in middies or accompanied by her mother but modestly wearing a ring on her left hand, heard herself kindly bidding Mr. Papenmeyer Goodafternoon, and feeling, as she said it, very close to her mother, feeling almost, as she nodded firmly to him, that she was her mother. (Gerald predicted with scorn that it would not be long before Katherine would speak of Mr. Papenmeyer as "my Mr. Papenmeyer" and he suspected that she would even add, in time, "he never disappoints"; but she was not to suppose, he said, that he would glance benignly over his *Saturday Evening Post* as her father did, and listen.)

Katherine hugged her packages like babies; in them lay, wrapped in glossy wax paper, in brown paper bags, in patent boxes, the dinner to which Katherine's mother and father were coming as guests. . . . The dinner over which Katherine would frown at Gerald politely insulting Mrs. Benjamin; over which Mr. Benjamin would cough and insist on the worst cuts of everything. . . . She hoped nervously that Gerald would not be insolent and argumentative, that her mother would not be stupid. . . . She must protect them both. . . . And she began to dread the strangeness which always oppressed her on beholding her mother in a house which was her home and not her mother's. . . . Ridiculous, she said brightly, I'm not going to let *that* happen again. . . .

The spire of the church on the corner raised itself in the form of a huge salt-shaker against the mild, colorless sky. The sun, a blurred yellow lamp, glimmered palely behind veils of soiled cloud; it might rain, for the air was sodden, the leaves on the tree before the church hovered on the air

with a peculiar waiting indifference, like dead fish turned over on their backs and floating in still water.

And for years to come she, "Mrs. Gerald Jastrow," would walk, heavily laden with her thoughts and her packages, in Fall, in Winter, and in Spring, from Mr. Papenmeyer's meat-and-grocery store through these same streets, past the church with its salt-shaker spire, past the row of low brick houses, past the tall india-rubber apartment with the liveried door-man shuffling his feet under the awning, stretched like a hollow wrinkled caterpillar to the curb, to her own home, which she shared with Gerald, of whom she had never heard two years before. . . .

Katherine's fingers, tapping the sagging bundles, reviewed their contents. Meat—Mr. Papenmeyer's recommended cut for four—bread, milk, corn, tomatoes—without her asking, the clerk had passionately assured her they were firm—two large packages it amounted to, one small slippery one under her elbow, and her purse. By a minute flexing of her left hand she could feel the key tucked neatly in her glove to save her trouble when she reached her door. An absurd ritual, that, said Gerald; one which in the sum total could not save her much trouble. You've picked up all these damn habits, he said, from your mother: they're a waste of time, they take more time to remember than simply to leave out; be careful, Katherine, before you know it you will be keeping a platinum-framed market-list. But these little rituals made doing the things fun, Katherine argued; when she remembered, at the grocer's before picking up her packages, to tuck the key in her glove, a horde of vague recollections, almost recollections of recollections, unraveled pleasantly in her mind. They gave meaning to what would otherwise be just marketing; they formed a link not only with yesterday and tomorrow, but with other women squinting at scales

and selecting dinners for strange men to whom they found themselves married; with, if you like, her mother, who had been doing these things every day for thirty years. You may say pooh Gerald, she said, but there are many things which you, who are after all a man, cannot be expected to know; why two years ago you didn't even know *me*. . . .

Were the flat faces she had left haggling over green peas and punching cantaloupes aware of the waiting uncertainties, the unrooting, the transplanting, the bleeding, involved in their calmly leaving their homes to go to live with strangers? Strangers—husbands—Gerald A. Jastrow—I met a boy named Gerald A. Jastrow at a party, he asked to take me home—I am sorry, I am seeing a boy named Gerald Jastrow, he has a cowlick which trembles when he argues—but mother I am seeing Gerald tonight—Gerald says, Gerald thinks—I am going to be married—his name? (*whose* name?—oh, the Stranger's)—his name is Jastrow, Gerald Jastrow—I've been married for eleven months—my husband's name is Gerald Jastrow, no I don't know him, he's a Stranger to me, but I put away his male-smelling underwear. . . . Katherine reached the sidewalk just in time to avoid a cab which sped down the street in front of her house.

She smiled brightly at the elevator man, an expert, busy, kindly smile; she felt again like her mother. "Wouldn't be surprised if a storm blew up," Albert said to her shrewdly, resting his hand in a friendly way on the lever. (A storm, she didn't want a storm, Katherine thought, suddenly frightened; Gerald might say what he liked about the risk of motoring being greater than that of flying, and the chance of being murdered in sleep greater than that of being struck by lightning: she *wouldn't* fly, and she cowered before thunder and lightning.) "Oh do you think so?" said Mrs. Gerald Jastrow, and she looked in awe at the elevator man, as if it was all in his hands whether a storm came or not.

"Oh I hope not," she pleaded. The elevator stopped on a level with her floor, her door was before her, familiar, with its arty streaks, its brass knob and keyhole, the number 21 in black painted letters. Albert, slamming the door of his cage, determined to go the whole hog. "Well I wouldn't be surprised," he said, and dropped suddenly out of sight.

Katherine could not bear to drop a single one of her burdens, now that she had come so far; she made a series of supreme efforts, balancing, juggling, squirming, forcing her key out of her glove with fractional, inch-worm motions, still carefully separating the bottle of milk from the package of Best Eggs, evoking a new muscle to keep the small package from slipping.

And then she was in, in her own house, with the door shut behind her, and the yellow curtains dancing on the window panes, the stove standing, homely and patient, in the small kitchen, the chairs sitting in friendly fashion, as if themselves guests at a tea-party, just as she had left them. . . .

Suddenly she was overcome by a swift engulfing depression. She stood at the door of the yellow room and was unable to put down the packages in her arms. The air in the room stood hot and heavy, waiting, like Albert, with melancholy assurance, for storm; the curtains flapped treacherously.

What nonsense, she said crisply, amazingly comforted by a slant of faint sunlight which quivered through the gloom. Look, she said, it is my own house. . . . Reassured, she dropped her packages on the kitchen table. But someone should be there to greet her, she felt, to rise from one of those friendly chairs and say to her: What did you buy? How was Mr. Papenmeyer the butcher? Was the one-eyed errand boy there today? Come in, take off your hat and

gloves, I am glad you are home. . . . A year ago she would have stood at the door and shouted *Moth-er*, where *are* you? And if Mrs. Benjamin had not come in haste at her call, a white-aproned German maid (Mrs. Benjamin chaperoned their love-affairs so successfully that they generally stayed with her for years, like obedient nuns) would have come and said, Oh Miss Katy, your mother said to tell you she went over to your Aunt Sarah, your uncle's not feeling just right.

But she would call *up* her mother, she thought gleefully, running to the telephone: Hello, mother, what do you think I bought for supper? The butcher said . . . Do you think there will be a storm, mother? . . . As she lifted the receiver from its hook she thought she heard faint steps behind her; Gerald, she thought in a flash, and slid the receiver back to its place. Of course it wasn't Gerald, at four o'clock in the afternoon, of course it wasn't anybody; but suppose he had come upon her telephoning her mother: she could hear him say, as he had said last Sunday, catching her at the telephone (and of course one thought of one's mother on a long Sunday), Oh for God's sake, Katherine, like a two-year-old baby you are always running home to mother. . . . Cut off from her mother. Yet Gerald was right, she mustn't, she mustn't.

Loneliness surrounded Katherine like a high black fence. Then why not call up Gerald, why not rush to the telephone and call Gerald at his office (where she could never visualize him); if only she could call him up and say to him: I have just come home to our house. It is pleasant and cool, the curtains are still yellow. I shall take off my dress and read. Then I shall cook dinner, for you, for me, for my father and mother—you haven't forgotten they are coming? you'll come early?—*Gerald, what are you doing?* But she knew his firm "Jastrow speaking," and she could guess, if she dared to go beyond it, at his business-like: "What do you *want*, dear?" Well, what *did* she want, she wondered impatiently, and

strained to discover whether that was thunder or furniture moving.

Probably Gerald was right, she thought wearily—for he was so often “right” in a logical, meaningless way—that thinking about every small thing, attaching significances to every moment, wishing to communicate every small thought, was, besides being sentimental, “an imbecilic waste of time.” Gerald railed against sentimentality, and, charmingly, disarmingly, gave way to it at moments. When the moment passed Gerald shed it like a wet bathing suit, and emerged cool and casual, forgetful and untouched. But with her mother, these moments grew into comfortable hours, never forgotten, linking one with another, remaining always, a steady undercurrent, ready to rise and fill them at the lightest touch.

And sliding the bread into the shining modern breadbox she felt a strong nostalgia for the worn-out tin that had stood for years on her mother’s shelf. This cold affair of shelves and sliding doors, glittering knobs and antiseptic lettering suggested too much newness, too little use and familiarity; her mother’s loomed in contrast, a symbol of security, almost a refuge from storm. And yet Mrs. Benjamin, with the vision of that old, battered, loyal thing in the back of her mind, had come with Katherine graciously, gayly even, to buy this tawdry substitute. (My little girl, she had said to the clerk, smiling ironically at him and drawing him into her sympathy, would like that Modern Breadbox. It was as if she had said, My little girl has tired of her old mother, she wants the latest thing in young men, one that can scientifically explain away the fear of lightning.) Feeling warmly bound to her mother, she caught herself opening and slamming the little door a second, unnecessary time, an old nervous habit of her mother’s. For a moment she felt purified, intensely loyal, as if by this gesture she had renounced

the new for the old. She walked from the kitchen with her mother's tired, elastic step, the step of a stout woman who has shopped all day, whose weary body will neither submit to rest nor ignore the stern orders of fashion. It was a step singularly unsuited to Katherine's slimness, but it was comfortable now, familiar; she slid gratefully into it, like one falling into a cushioned rocker which is too large for the body but provides, nevertheless, a warm and comfortable harbor. And so she bent her body back from the waist and became her mother, balancing her stout body, carrying the heaviest part bravely before her. (Your mother navigates like a boat, Gerald had said to her once. Katherine, ruefully succumbing to the justice of the description, had come starkly awake on the edge of falling asleep that night, and cried bitterly, not because Gerald, whom she hated for sleeping soundly beside her, had said it, but because she had laughed.)

Oh of course Gerald was "right," she told herself. And yet, this coming home eagerly, her arms aching with pleasant weights, delighting in facing those yellow curtains again, with no one to greet her, and unable to telephone because what she had to say to her husband was irrelevant—her mother wouldn't like it, she felt. But between two people who lived together, why should anything be irrelevant? nothing she could ever say, she knew, would be irrelevant to her mother: how eagerly Mrs. Benjamin had awaited reports of adventures no more important than a shopping expedition, a subway jam, a lunch engagement. (Oh but that had been stupid, stupid—inadequate. You told your mother insignificant things because you knew she wouldn't understand the important ones. Gerald's words: but true, true.) But Gerald himself had so *little* concern for the small things she did all day that she refrained from telling him anecdotes which she passionately feared might bore him, but



which, nevertheless, she collected like bouquets of precious flowers to lay before him if she dared. Looking about the empty room, Gerald's desk standing solidly in one corner reproved her; she became irritated that her mind flew so often to thoughts of her mother. . . .

Like a human shuttle she wove her way between these two, between Gerald and her mother, the two opposites who supported her web. (Why couldn't they both leave her alone?) When she was with her mother she could not rest, for she thought continually of the beacon of Gerald's intelligence, which must be protected from her mother's sully-ing incomprehension. And when she was with Gerald her heart ached for her deserted mother, she longed for her large enveloping sympathy in which to hide away from Gerald's too-clear gaze. From sheer hopelessness and irritation, tears filled her eyes. . . .

She was glad to escape from the kitchen, for she had begun to hate Mr. Papenmeyer's excellent foods, which would merge artfully and serve as the camouflage of a family battle. As long as the dinner lasted, she knew the conversation could be kept meager and on a safely mediocre level. But Katherine, sitting between her mother and father, and eyeing her husband with apprehension, would know that around her own table, consuming food she herself had prepared, a victim would be fattened for slaughter, a victor strengthened for battle. And whoever won, Katherine lost. . . . Oh come, she told herself, exasperated, this isn't the Last Supper. . . .

But that wasn't furniture moving, she told herself grimly, crouching on the window-sill and regarding the street which was lying quietly in its place before her house—not twice, she said, that's Albert's thunder. It rumbled from a great distance, as though it were in hiding.

Certainly, she thought, her mind returning, like a dog worrying a bone, she lived with Gerald on a higher plane—if her misery was sometimes more acute, her pleasure, in proportion, was more poignant. While they had felt nothing deeply, Katherine and her mother, as they had built up, over tea-tables, simple patterns of thought, simplified ways of looking at things. What if Katherine had had to stoop her mind so that they might stay together? at least they could talk, at least they kept each other company. (Gerald said their talk was no more than gossip; he said that Katherine and her mother had shut themselves up in a hot-house, talking and comforting each other for griefs that could never come to them while they remained in their lethargic half-life.) But in a world like this, thought Katherine, where thunder-storms can creep on one ruthlessly, why shouldn't two people who love each other hide away and give one another comfort?

Thunder rumbled more constantly now. Katherine, suspicious of it, in spite of its distance, detected in its muffled rolling a growing concentration, as if it were slowly gathering its strength, as if it were winding itself up for a tremendous spring. Should she telephone Gerald?—*no*.

The thought of Gerald frightened her. He led such a curious existence apart from her every day from nine till six. Katherine and her mother had always known exactly what the other was doing, at almost every hour in the day. It was a comfort to stop suddenly, look at one's watch, and think "Mother's at the dentist's now" or "I should think mother would be on the way home now." But there were times when Gerald was in the room with her, sitting beside her, lying beside her in bed, when she didn't know exactly where he was. . . .

Gerald said—and with some justice, she admitted to her-

self—that she and her mother had lived like two spoiled wives in a harem kept by a simple old gentleman who demanded nothing of them beyond their presence and the privilege of supporting them. But because of his docility one could not take seriously a possible injustice to him. Besides his work down town, Mr. Benjamin mailed their letters, called for their purchases, or did any of the little errands which they had spent the day in pleasantly avoiding. If he entered the room where Katherine and her mother were talking, it had seemed quite natural for Mrs. Benjamin to say, "Dear, we are talking"; it seemed natural because of the peaceful expression with which Mr. Benjamin picked up his *Saturday Evening Post* on the way out of the room. All Katherine's uncles were disposed of in the same way by her aunts.

Gerald referred to the Benjamin men as "poor devils," as "emasculated boobs." You resent me, he said to Katherine, because you have a preconceived idea of the rôle to which all husbands are relegated by their wives; you'd like to laugh me out of any important existence. (Indeed, it was only at moments when he was away and when she was performing, in his absence, some intimate service for him, that she could look upon Gerald as her mother looked upon her father; with ease, with possession, with a maternal tolerance touched by affectionate irony. Here were things of which she could be certain: that he rolled his underwear into a ball and dropped it on the floor, that he left his shoes to lie where they fell, that he draped yesterday's tie around the back of a chair. But she could never achieve this intimacy in his presence: when Gerald was with her, when she *thought* about Gerald, it faded; there was more strangeness.) Gerald again! She was aware of a wish to sink Gerald into the bottom of her mind: she was too much aware of him;

when she read, when she visited, when she noticed things, it was always with the desire to report back to Gerald: nothing was complete until Gerald had been told.

She and her mother had discussed and reported everything. But she could no longer be alone with her mother, for it seemed as though Gerald sat in taunting effigy between them, forcing Katherine for her mother's sake to deprecate him, for his sake to protect him, from obscurity, from misrepresentation, from neglect . . .

His presence, even now, while she was alone, sat heavily, reproachfully, in the empty rooms, forbidding her to call him up, forbidding her to recall comfortably past days she had spent with her mother. This was not living, Gerald said, to spend one's hours in introspective analysis, to brood over the past. Katherine's flights he called "a worthless luxury, like the visits of the rich to Palm Beach or Paris." But it was living, Katherine knew unhappily; she was living most acutely.

The room darkened suddenly. Something of the tension which would be upon her later, as it always was when her mother and Gerald were in the same room, came upon her now, as she sat straining for the sound of thunder, watching shades of gloom silently lay themselves in the hot room. Katherine held her breath waiting for thunder, for rain, anything. Voices of children floated reassuringly up from the street, and in a moment the sunlight reappeared, tentative, tempting one to believe in it for all its faintness. The thunder sounded like the chopping of wood in a far-off field. Katherine longed for her mother. She wished she were not so near the heart of the storm.

She hated herself for thinking of her mother. But not to think of her demanded a complete uprooting, demanded a final shoving off from a safe dock into unknown waters.

Besides, she felt guilty toward her mother, she brooded over her as one does over a victim, pitying him, resenting him and utterly unable to forget him.

For against her mother Katherine felt that she had committed a crime. She had abandoned that elderly lady for a young man who, from her mother's point of view, had been merely one of several who had taken her to dances, to dinner, who had kissed her in the parlor, with whom finally, inexplicably, she had come to have more dates than with any other. She had abandoned her mother, left her sitting at home with no more evening gowns to "take in," no one to sit up for, no young men to laugh about in the bathroom at four o'clock in the morning when Katherine came home. She had left her to sit opposite an old man at dinner every evening, she had imposed upon her the tragedy of being a guest in her own daughter's house; she had reduced her to a stranger.

But a little bit her mother had the advantage. She had seen Gerald, after all, in the absurd rig of tuxedo and stiff shirt, calling upon her daughter with flowers, with books, leaping to his feet when she (Mrs. Benjamin) entered the room. She had watched Gerald for a year politely talking parlor politics with Katherine's father, posturing ridiculously when he held Katherine's coat, becoming perforce friendly with the elevator boys in the Benjamin apartment, slinking shamefacedly before a doorman who had seen him too often. Nothing, Katherine reflected, could be more unreal, more unconvincing, than a young man in the act of courting. She could never forgive Gerald for having let her mother observe him in that rôle. (Equally she could never forgive her mother, blameless as she was, for having seen him.) Her mother could never take seriously, surely, a marriage which had grown from love-making in taxi-cabs which had been reported to her with amusement by Katherine, brushing

her teeth in the bathroom. She had not shared with her mother the tortuous transition which had left her no longer an amused observer, but a helpless, suffering participant. All the indication Mrs. Benjamin had had of Katherine's growing need of Gerald was a burst of hysteria and a state of nervous irritability which had succeeded the usual calm of Katherine's disposition—before suddenly one evening, preparing her charity report in a black lace dress, she was confronted by two embarrassed young people who declared their ridiculous intention to marry.

This, Katherine felt, she should have spared her mother. She should not have caused her, so heartbreakingly, to drop her charity report on the marble table and to look suddenly at her daughter with reproachful eyes, saying, half-humorously, What, daughter, tired of your old mother already?

She had left her parents for no reason, they had given her no cause to leave them, she had left them for no better reason than that when Gerald said to her that he would never again ask her to marry him, she had been seized with panic lest he meant it.

Gerald, who two years before had not existed. Whereas her father and mother had fed her porridge, given her blackboards, measured her growth against a door, for a long period of twenty years during which Gerald had never heard of her. She was unsafe, she cried internally. She was living with a stranger in a strange land where storms evolved closely about one. She was living with a stranger who had no knowledge of the first twenty years of her life, the major portion of her life. She was living in a strange land where her childhood had no existence. It was unreal, it was unsafe, it was terrifying. Gerald liked to hear her tell stories of her childhood; but it was as if, when she told him little things she remembered, she and he were together contemplating the childhood of a stranger. She held tightly to the arms of her

chair, but the slippery wood was repelling. Suddenly everything was reduced to an absurdity. It was, to Gerald, as though she had not begun to exist until he had noticed her two years before, at a party, and asked to take her home; but suppose she had not come to the party—she had come only out of boredom; or suppose, to make it more ridiculous, she had not worn the particular blue dress which had caught Gerald's eye? and he hadn't asked to take her home? Their life together seemed no more than the result of a series of insignificant accidents. Could it be real? Could she share the rest of her life with a stranger whose eye had casually fallen on a blue dress? With someone who had known her for only two years out of her twenty-two?

Katherine felt herself to be struggling somewhere in the middle, between two harbors, unable to decide whether to swim backward or forward, tempted almost to close her eyes and quietly drown where she was. Shuttle, shuttle, she murmured to herself, miserably, exasperated at her weakness, her helplessness.

Smoking in the yellow room, she waited with unhappy certainty for Albert's storm which would surely come now. The air was oppressively, sullenly pregnant. It was as if an evil thing crouched in the room, waiting for birth. Dark was gathering in shades, permitting still a faint yellowish gloom. Wind was dead. Katherine, fearing and hating the coming storm, nevertheless feared and hated the moments of waiting even more. A clock on the mantel slowly ticked off the moments she would have to wait; it was in league with the coming storm. Her body was chill in the midst of heat.

She was weary already with the nervous effort she would make to bring Gerald and her mother close to each other, with her own struggle to remain equally close to both of them, simultaneous with her desperate attempt to conceal

from each the affection she felt for the other. Gerald and her mother sitting and eating in this room, which now was the home of the storm, would be a cat and mouse, quietly stalking each other under cover. (Was this true? or did their struggle for supremacy take place merely in her own mind? Because she must know, she must know.) Katherine would twist herself this way and that to keep the evening characterless and blessedly dull, rather than immerse them all in the horror of an argument, in which their superficial sides would represent symbolically their eternal, fundamental resentment. Katherine must take no sides, Katherine must flit nervously from one side to the other, breaching gaps with hysterical giggles, throwing herself into outbursts of hysterical affection, making a clown of herself in order to distract these two who fought silently for her. She was loathsome to herself.

Her mind struggled with a remote memory. Something—perhaps the slumbering quality of the air which sheltered the coming storm so that its pent-up evil would suddenly roll forth and smother the world—reminded her of a thing which seemed to have happened when she was a child. Frowning, she gazed into herself to recall. And it came back to her. She had cried one day for her mother and they had told her that Mrs. Benjamin had gone to Atlantic City for two days and that this young lady would take care of Katherine while her mother was away. Katherine kicked and screamed, but Miss Anna proved so entertaining—she showed her how to make a whole family of paper dolls live through a day's work and play—that she forgot her mother and was surprised to hear the next day that she would be home in an hour. Suddenly she hated Miss Anna, and when Mrs. Benjamin came home she found her daughter crying angrily, Miss Anna bewildered, murmuring, But she seemed so happy, she seemed perfectly happy. . . . I was not happy



for a minute, Katherine screamed, I was waiting the whole time for my mother to come back.

Enraged with herself, she wondered whether she retained somewhere the idea that because her life had begun with her mother, it would end with her, whether some childish part of her could not accept their parting as final and looked upon her life with Gerald as no more than an interlude. Oh Gerald, Gerald, she sobbed, I am worse than unfaithful to you . . . I hate my mother, she is a venomous old woman who tries to keep me from you. . . . The injustice to her mother overwhelmed her. She hated herself. She felt like the child of divorced parents, driven from one to the other and unable with either to make a home.

I have been married during every month except June, she thought, lifting her head and quietly looking, as if to remember, about the room. She was comforted by Gerald's desk, which had been with her during eleven months. Thunder, blasting the earth in a distant place, filled the room. She had been married for eleven months and had never told her mother anything but housekeeping troubles. Why? A second roll of thunder sounded.

She was surrounded, she could not escape. She was suspended, she could take refuge with neither Gerald nor her mother, she was caught fairly by the thunder. . . .

Deception had begun with her engagement. One had to keep one's eyes constantly glowing, however terrifiedly they looked at the approaching cliff, one's words constantly gay and effervescent, lest one's mother look searchingly at the prospective bride and say, But are you sure, Darling, absolutely *sure*? Of course one was not sure. One was suspended, even as now, with thunders rolling in from all sides. (I ought to start the dinner, I ought to start the dinner: I *can't*, I *can't*.)

During a wedding trip one was awakened to innumerable things, most of them delightful, all of them terrifying. A longing had filled Katherine intermittently to be back from this trip of surprises: she pictured herself talking to her mother all day for many days, sharing with her, not details, but the contemplation, of intimacies. It seemed to her the most delicious part of the trip, that she would return and talk about it to her mother. Gerald's jealous allusions to her mother she had accepted with a tolerant smile; his analyses—for it was then that he had violently expounded his harem theory—meant nothing to her, they seemed to have no connection with reality. "Dearest mother," she had written, "all the things I have to tell you! I can hardly wait to see you . . . So many things have happened. And of course, Gerald being a man . . ." (Was that lightning, or was it the mere lifting of the curtain by the wind? The dinner, the dinner was waiting to be cooked: I won't *touch* it.)

The awful farce at the station, where Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin had come to meet them, came to her vividly now. Mr. Benjamin, having screwed his courage to the point of making Katherine remember his presence long enough to kiss him, retiring to help Gerald, competently wasting time with the luggage in the background, mother and daughter swaying in a series of embraces—Katherine was suddenly lost, locked, imprisoned, in the body of a stout, fashionable stranger. Why doesn't she look at me? she thought, all she wants is to hold me, to squeeze me, to choke me to death, it never occurs to her to look in my face. Sweeping her daughter to one side, Mrs. Benjamin sprang forth to smother Gerald. She had no right to, cried Katherine wildly to herself, as she turned from her father's vague embrace, and all the things which Gerald had said of her mother came back to her and they seemed true. And at the same time she felt passionately that Mrs. Benjamin must not expose herself

to Gerald's unsympathetic eye; horrible embarrassment arose in her, when, thank God, she saw that Mrs. Benjamin in her eagerness had missed her aim; her kiss floated on past Gerald's clean indifferent cheek—he at least was unsullied, and at the same time her mother was protected from nakedness. Mrs. Benjamin, discarding Gerald, threw her arms around Katherine once more, with force and meaning, and kissed her in great wet gulps. "Katherine, Katherine," she sobbed, rocking her great body from side to side, "I've got you again, darling. Let's leave all these men and go off together, darling." Katherine felt fastidious, she drew her body back delicately from the impact of her mother's.

Mrs. Benjamin shook off the two men, she carried Katherine off to a tea-room—their old favorite tea-room—for lunch, a confidential lunch it was supposed to be, but Katherine had grown to hate tea-rooms, a month with Gerald had taught her to hate shrimp salad. . . . Mrs. Benjamin, suddenly squeezing her hand under the candle-lit table, looked into her eyes, her own eyes fatuous, confident, worried and questioning, "Katherine, darling Katherine, now tell me the 'many things' you wrote about." Katherine, looking into her mother's avid eyes, knew that she could never tell her anything again.

How horribly she must have hurt her, thought Katherine, gravely hurt herself at the recollection. In bed beside Gerald that night she had lain, trying to make the night go faster, so that she might see her mother and change what she had done. She thought of her mother lying sleepless, even as she was, beside a sleeping husband, thinking, bitterly thinking, of the thing that had happened between them. But Katherine could never undo the thing that was between them, for it was Gerald who stood between her mother and herself, just as her mother stood between herself and Gerald.

Well, *was* Albert's storm coming or wasn't it, she thought

impatiently, and beat out her cigarette on the window-sill, dropped the dead stub and watched it hurtle past awnings and window-boxes and land haphazardly in the gutter. (And what about the dinner?)

A clap of thunder brought her trembling to her feet. It had traveled with treacherous silence from a great distance to burst like a shell in her ear. And now lightning quivered across the pewter sky in a blinding streak. Katherine, trembling, holding to the mantel, felt all the elements of storm gathering closely about her. The intense heat and stillness in the room vibrated with suppressed force. She had a sense of something evil, something unhealthy, waiting beneath the table to be born. The room was alive, awake, crouching before the storm, waiting in every sense for its approach.

She laughed aloud, nervously, when the thunder sounded next, meek and far-off; it rumbled for a few seconds, then it rolled toward her with increasing force until something cut it off sharply in the height of its passion. The storm was playing with her; it was here, but it played at hiding, it retreated and advanced so that she could never be sure of it.

What was she to do, what was she to do? Should she, could she telephone?—*no*.

Thunder shook the house. Malicious streaks of lightning drew themselves across the sky, lighting up the gloom until the day shone for a second like steel. Suddenly night came. Winds came alive and tore drunkenly down the street. Another long reverberating crash of thunder, incredibly near and ear-splitting. There was a moment of suspension, while only the wind moved. And then the sky retched and large cold drops of rain like stones pelted the windowpanes. . . .

Panic seized Katherine. She rushed to the window to escape. She was afraid of the room. It rocked with unhappy speculation. She stood at the window facing in, and saw

how the storm was fed from within her room. The lightning lit it like quick fire, the thunder sounded in it long after it had died outside.

The thunder bounced about the room, striking at corners, rolling over furniture, shaking the walls, groveling derisively at her feet.

It seemed to her that before the next clap of thunder she must have reached a decision or she would die. But what decision, she cried, striking her fist against the window? What decision? about what? The problem was obscure. (She imagined her mother struck by lightning, her stout body collapsing with dignity under a tree, she heard herself telling Gerald with triumph as an overtone to her grief, My mother is dead, I have only you now.) And if the problem was obscure, how much more obscure the solution. (She imagined Gerald struck by lightning, a look of hurt surprise in his eyes as he fell beneath a tree, murmuring something about scientific chance, she heard herself telling her mother, strange relief mingling with her sorrow, Gerald is gone, mother, I shall have to come back to you.) And the next thunder rolled down a hill, louder and louder, faster and nearer, and fell to the bottom, bursting into cannon balls, exploding with insane crashes, and in a thousand voices splitting the earth in its center. Katherine burst into passionate tears.

Now everything was the storm. The storm, which had circled about the room, wished for closer nucleus, and entered her body. The lightning pierced her stomach, the thunder shook her limbs, and retreated, growling, to its home in her bowels. There was no escape for her; she was no longer imprisoned in the storm: the storm was imprisoned in her.

She stood in a shaking lethargy, she had no will, no feeling. She was frozen; she was a shell in which storm raged

without her will. All the world had entered the room. . . .

It came to her slowly that there was a new sound in the air, a sharp metallic ring that repeated itself at intervals. She had no idea how long she might have been hearing it in the back of her head before she took notice of it. Now it rang again, sharply, there seemed to be fright in it, or anger, she could not tell which. On stiff legs she ran down the hall toward the door, by reflex knowing that it was the door-bell which had sounded. But with her hand on the knob something held her back. She could not force herself to turn the knob, to move her hand, even to call out, Wait, wait . . .

Was it her mother, or was it Gerald? Which, in the midst of storm, did she want it to be? It seemed to her that she could not open the door until she knew. A great ball of thunder followed her out of the room she had left, hurtled down the hall and broke beside her, and in the midst of it the terrified bell rang repeatedly, in small staccato notes, shrilling through the depth of the thunder, prodding . . .

She did not know. She knew only, as she closed her eyes and slowly turned the handle of the door, and drew it in toward herself, that she wished that one of them, Gerald or her mother, were dead.



## THE ONLY CHILD<sup>1</sup>

BY BOOTH TARKINGTON

*Two young parents disagree about the discipline of their only child, finally learn that there are reasons why he behaves as he does.*

THE little boy was afraid to go into the dark room on the other side of the hall, and the little boy's father was disgusted with him. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Ludlum Thomas?" the father called from his seat by the library lamp. "Eight years old and scared! Scared to step into a room and turn the light on! Why, when I was your age I used to go out to the barn after dark in the wintertime, and up into the loft, all by myself, and pitch hay down to the horse through the chute. You walk straight into that dining room, turn on the light, and get what you want; and don't let's have any more fuss about it. You hear me?"

Ludlum disregarded this speech. "Mamma," he called, plaintively, "I want you to come and turn the light on for me. *Please*, mamma!"

Mrs. Thomas, across the library table from her husband, looked troubled, and would have replied, but the head of the house checked her.

"Now let me," he said. Then he called again: "You going in there and do what I say, or not?"

"Please come on, mamma," Ludlum begged. "Mamma, I lef' my bow-an'-arry in the dining-room, an' I want to get

<sup>1</sup> From *The Fascinating Stranger* by Booth Tarkington (New York, Doubleday, Page and Co., 1923). Reprinted by permission of the author.

it out o' there so's I can take it up to bed with me. Mamma, won't you please come turn the light on for me?"

"No, she will not!" Mr. Thomas shouted. "What on earth are you afraid of?"

"Mamma—"

"Stop calling your mother! She's not coming. You were sitting in the dining-room yourself, not more than an hour ago, at dinner, and you weren't afraid then, were you?"

Ludlum appeared between the brown curtains of the library doorway—the sketch of a rather pale child-prince in black velvet. "No, but—" he said.

"But what?"

"It was all light in there then. Mamma an' you were in there, too."

"Now look here!" Mr. Thomas paused, rested his book upon his knee, and spoke slowly. "You know there's nothing in that dining-room except the table and the chairs and the sideboard, don't you?"

Ludlum's eyes were not upon his father but upon the graceful figure at the other side of the table. "Mamma," he said, "won't you *please* come get my bow-an'-arry for me?"

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, sir," the boy replied, with eyes still pleading upon his mother.

"Well, then, what is there to be afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid," said Ludlum. "It's dark in there."

"It won't be dark if you turn on the light, will it?"

"Mamma—"

"Now, that's enough!" the father interrupted testily. "It's after eight. You go on up to bed."

Ludlum's tone began to indicate a mental strain. "I don't *want* to go to bed without my bow-an'-arry!"

"What do you want your bow and arrow when you're in bed for?"



"I got to have it!"

"See here!" said Mr. Thomas. "You march up to bed and quit talking about your bow and arrow. You can take them with you if you go in there right quick and get them; but whether you do that or not you'll march to bed inside of one minute from now!"

"I *got* to have my bow-an'-arry. I got to, to go upstairs *with!*"

"You don't want your bow and arrow in bed with you, do you?"

"Mamma!" Thus Ludlum persisted in his urgent appeal to that court in whose clemency he trusted. "Mamma, will you *please* come get my bow-an'—"

"No, she won't."

"Then will you come upstairs with me, mamma?"

"No, she won't! You'll go by yourself, like a man."

"Mamma—"

Mrs. Thomas intervened cheerily. "Don't be afraid, dearie," she said. "Your papa thinks you ought to begin to learn how to be manly; but the lights are lit all the way, and I told Annie to turn on the one in your room. You just go ahead like a good boy, and when you're all undressed and ready to jump in bed, then you just whistle for me—"

"I don't want to whistle," said Ludlum irritably. "I want my bow-an'-arry!"

"Look here!" cried his father. "You start for—"

"I got to have my bow-an'—"

"You mean to disobey me?"

"I *got* to have my—"

Mr. Thomas rose; his look became ominous. "We'll see about that!" he said; and he approached his son, whose apprehensions were expressed in a loud cry.

"*Mamma!*"

"Don't hurt his feel—" Mrs. Thomas began.

"Something's got to be done," her husband said grimly, and his hand fell upon Ludlum's shoulder. "You march!" Ludlum muttered vaguely.

"You march!"

"I got to have my bow-an'-arry! I *can't* go to bed 'less mamma comes with me! She's *got* to come with me!"

Suddenly he made a scene. Having started it, he went in for all he was worth and made it a big one. He shrieked, writhed away from his father's hand, darted to his mother, and clung to her with spasmodic violence throughout the protracted efforts of the sterner parent to detach him.

When these efforts were finally successful, Ludlum plunged upon the floor, and fastened himself to the leg of a heavy table. Here, for a considerable time, he proved the superiority of an earnest boy's wind and agility over those of a man: as soon as one part of him was separated from the leg of the table another part of him became attached to it; and all the while was he vehemently eloquent, though un-rhetorical.

The pain he thus so powerfully expressed was undeniable; and nowadays few adults are capable of resisting such determined agony. The end of it was, that when Ludlum retired he was accompanied by both parents, his father carrying him, and Mrs. Thomas following close behind with the bow-an'-arry.

They were thoughtful when they returned to the library.

"I *would* like to know what got him into such a state," said the father, groaning, as he picked up his book from the floor. "He used to march upstairs like a little man, and he wasn't afraid of the dark, or of anything else; but he's beginning to be afraid of his own shadow. What's the matter with him?"

Mrs. Thomas shook her head. "I think it's his constitu-

tion," she said. "I don't believe he's as strong as we thought he was."

"'Strong'!" her husband repeated incredulously. "Have I been dreaming, or *were* you looking on when I was trying to pry him loose from that table-leg?"

"I mean nervously," she said. "I don't think his nerves are what they ought to be at all."

"His nerve isn't!" he returned. "That's what I'm talking about! Why was he afraid to step into our dining-room—not thirty feet from where we were sitting?"

"Because it was dark in there. Poor child, he *did* want his bow and arrow!"

"Well, he got 'em! What did he want 'em for?"

"To protect himself on the way to bed."

"To keep off burglars on our lighted stairway?"

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Thomas. "Burglars or something."

"Well, where'd he get such ideas *from*?"

"I don't know. Nearly all children do get them."

"I know one thing," Mr. Thomas asserted, "I certainly never was afraid like that, and none of my brothers was, either. Do you suppose the children Ludlum plays with tell him things that make him afraid of the dark?"

"I don't think so, because he plays with the same children now that he played with before he got so much this way. Of course he's always been a *little* timid."

"Well, I'd like to know what's at the root of it. Something's got into his head. That's certain, isn't it?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Thomas said musingly. "I believe fear of the dark is a sort of instinct, don't you?"

"Then why does he keep having it more and more? Instinct? No, sir! I don't know where he gets his silly scaredness from, nor what makes it, but I know that it won't do to humor him in it. We've got to be firmer with him after

this than we were to-night. I'm not going to have a son of mine grow up to be afraid!"

"Yes; I suppose we ought to be a *little* firmer with him," she said dreamily.

However, for several days and nights there was no occasion to exercise this new policy of firmness with Ludlum, one reason being that he was careful not to leave his trusty bow and arrow in an unlighted room after dark. Three successive evenings, weapon in hand, he "marched" sturdily to bed; but on the fourth he was reluctant, even though equipped as usual.

"Is Annie upstairs?" he inquired querulously, when informed that his hour had struck.

"I'm not sure, dearie," said his mother. "I think so. It's her evening out, but I don't think she's gone."

Standing in the library doorway, Ludlum sent upward a series of piercing cries: "Annie! Annee! Ann-ee! Oh, *Ann-nee-ee!*"

"Stop it!" Mr. Thomas commanded fiercely. "You want to break your mother's ear-drums?"

"Ann-nee-eee!"

"Stop that noise!"

"Ann—"

"Stop it!" Mr. Thomas made the gesture of rising, and Ludlum, interrupting himself abruptly, was silent until he perceived that his father's threat to rise was only a gesture, whereupon he decided that his vocalizations might safely be renewed.

"Ann-nee-ee!"

"What *is* the matter with him?"

"Ludlum, dear," said Mrs. Thomas, "what is it you want Annie for?"

"I want to know if she's upstairs."

"But what for?"

Ludlum's expression became one of determination. "Well, I want to know," he replied. "I got to know if Annie's upstairs."

"By George!" Mr. Thomas exclaimed suddenly. "I believe *now* he's afraid to go upstairs unless he knows the housemaid's up there!"

"Martha's probably upstairs if Annie isn't," Mrs. Thomas hurriedly intervened. "You needn't worry about whether Annie's up there, Luddie, if Martha is. Martha wouldn't let anything hurt you any more than Annie would, dear."

"Great heavens!" her husband cried. "There's nothing up there that's going to hurt him whether a hundred cooks and housemaids are upstairs or downstairs, or in the house or out of it! *That's* no way to talk to him, Jennie! Ludlum, you march straight—"

"Ann-*nee-ee!*"

"But, dearie," said Mrs. Thomas, "I told you that Martha wouldn't let anything hurt—"

"She isn't there," Ludlum declared. "I can hear her chinkin' tin and dishes around in the kitchen." And, again exerting all his vocal powers of penetration, "*Oh, Ann-ee-ee!*" he bawled.

"By George!" Mr. Thomas exclaimed. "This is awful! It's just awful!"

"Don't call any more, darling," the mother gently urged. "It disturbs your papa."

"But, Jennie, that isn't the reason he oughtn't to call. It does disturb me, but the real reason he oughtn't to do it is because he oughtn't to be afraid to—"

"Ann-*ee-EE!*"

Mr. Thomas uttered a loud cry of his own, and, dismissing gestures, rose from his chair prepared to act. But his son briskly disappeared from the doorway; he had been reassured from the top of the stairs, Annie had responded,

and Ludlum sped upward cheerfully. The episode was closed—except in meditation.

There was another one during the night, however. At least, Mr. Thomas thought so, for at the breakfast table he inquired: "Was any one out of bed about half-past two? Something half woke me, and I thought it sounded like somebody knocking on a door, and then whispering."

Mrs. Thomas laughed. "It was only Luddie," she explained. "He had bad dreams, and came to my door, so I took him in with me for the rest of the night. He's all right, now, aren't you, Luddie? Mamma didn't let the bad dream hurt her little boy, did she?"

"It wasn't dreams," said Ludlum. "I was awake. I thought there was somep'm in my room. I bet there *was* somep'm in there, las' night!"

"Oh, murder!" his father lamented. "Boy nine years old got to go and wake up his *mamma* in the middle of the night, because he's scared to sleep in his own bed with a hall-light shining through the transom! What on earth were you afraid of?"

Ludlum's eyes clung to the consoling face of his mother. "I never said I *was* afraid. I woke up, an' I thought I saw somep'm in there."

"What kind of a 'something'?"

Ludlum looked resentful. "Well, I guess I know what I'm talkin' about," he said importantly. "I bet there *was* somep'm, too!"

"I declare I'm ashamed," Mr. Thomas groaned. "Here's the boy's godfather coming to visit us, and how's he going to help find out we're raising a coward?"

"John!" his wife exclaimed. "The idea of speaking like that just because Luddie can't help being a little imaginative!"

"Well, it's true," he said. "I'm ashamed for Lucius to find it out."

Mrs. Thomas laughed, and then, finding the large eyes of Ludlum fixed upon her hopefully, she shook her head. "Don't you worry, darling," she reassured him. "You needn't be afraid of what Uncle Lucius will think of his dear little Luddie."

"I'm not," Ludlum returned complacently. "He gave me a dollar las' time he was here."

"Well, he won't this time," his father declared crossly. "Not after the way you've been behaving lately. I'll see to that!"

Ludlum's lower lip moved pathetically and his eyes became softly brilliant—manifestations that increased the remarkable beauty he inherited from his mother.

"John!" cried Mrs. Thomas indignantly.

Ludlum wept at once, and between his gulplings implored his mother to prevent his father from influencing Uncle Lucius against the giving of dollars. "Don't *let* him, mammal!" he quavered. "An' 'fif Uncle Lucius wuw-wants to give me a dollar, he's got a right to, hasn't he, mamma? *Hasn't* he got a right to, mamma?"

"There, dearie! Of course!" she comforted him. "Papa won't tell Uncle Lucius. Papa is sorry, and only wants you to be happy and not cry any more."

Papa's manner indicated somewhat less sympathy than she implied; nevertheless, he presently left the house in a condition vaguely remorseful, which still prevailed, to the extent of a slight preoccupation, when he met Uncle Lucius at the train at noon.

Uncle Lucius—Lucius Brutus Allen, attorney-at-law of Marlow, Illinois, population more than three thousand, if you believed him—this Uncle Lucius was a reassuring sight,

even to the eyes of a remorseful father who had been persecuting the beautiful child of a lovely mother.

Mr. Allen was no legal uncle to Ludlum: he was really Mrs. Thomas's second cousin, and, ever since she was eighteen and he twenty-four, had been her favored squire. In fact, during her young womanhood, Mrs. Thomas and others had taken it as a matter of course that Lucius was in love with her; certainly that appeared to be his condition.

However, with the advent of Mr. John Thomas, Lucius Brutus Allen gave ground without resistance, and even assisted matters in a way which might have suggested to an outsider that he was something of a matchmaker as well as something of a lover. With a bravery that touched both the bride and bridegroom, he had stood up to the function of Best Man without a quaver—and, of course, since the day of Ludlum's arrival in the visible world, had been "Uncle Lucius."

He was thirty-five; of a stoutish, stocky figure; large-headed and thin-haired; pinkish and cheerful and warm. His warmth was due partly to the weather, and led to a continuous expectance on the part of Ludlum, for it was the habit of Uncle Lucius to keep his handkerchief in a pocket of his trousers. From the hour of his arrival, every time that Uncle Lucius put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a handkerchief to dry his dewy brow, Ludlum suffered a disappointment.

In fact, the air was so sticky that these disappointments were almost continuous, with the natural result that Ludlum became peevish; for nobody can be distinctly disappointed a dozen or so times an hour, during the greater part of an afternoon, and remain buoyantly amiable.

Finally he could bear it no longer. He had followed his parents and Uncle Lucius out to the comfortable porch, which gave them ampler air and the pretty sight of Mrs.



Thomas's garden, but no greater coolness; and here Uncle Lucius, instead of bringing forth from his pocket a dollar, produced, out of that storage, a fresh handkerchief.

"Goodness me, but you got to wipe your ole face a lot!" said Ludlum in a voice of pure spitefulness. "I guess why you're so hot mus' be you stuff yourself at meals, an' got all fat the way you are!"

Wherewith, he emitted a shrill and bitter laugh of self-applause for wit, while his parents turned to gaze upon him—Mrs. Thomas with surprise, and Mr. Thomas with dismay. To both of them his rudeness crackled out of a clear sky; they saw it as an effect detached from cause; therefore inexplicable.

"Ludlum!" said the father sharply.

"Dearie!" said the mother.

But the visitor looked closely at the vexed face. "What is it you've decided you don't like about me, Luddie?" he asked.

"You're too fat!" said Ludlum.

Both parents uttered exclamations of remonstrance, but Mr. Allen intervened. "I'm not so very fat," he said. "I've just realized what the trouble between us is, Luddie. I overlooked something entirely, but I'll fix it all right when we're alone together. Now that I've explained about it, you won't mind how often I take my handkerchief out of my pocket, will you?"

"What in the world!" Mrs. Thomas exclaimed. "What are you talking about?"

"It's all right," said Lucius.

Ludlum laughed; his face was restored to its serene beauty. Obviously, he again loved his Uncle Lucius, and a perfect understanding, mysterious to the parents, now existed between godfather and godson. In celebration, Ludlum shouted and ran to caper in the garden.

"By George!" said John Thomas. "You seem to understand him! I don't. I don't know what the dickens is in his mind, half the time."

Mrs. Thomas laughed condescendingly. "No wonder!" she said. "You're down town all the daytime and never see him except at breakfast and in the evenings."

"There's one thing puzzles me about it," said John. "If you understand him so well, why don't you ever tell *me* how to? What made him so smart-alecky to Lucius just now?"

Again she laughed with condescension. "Why, Luddie didn't mean to be fresh at all. He just spoke without thinking."

But upon hearing this interpretation, Mr. Allen cast a rueful glance at his lovely cousin. "Quite so!" he said. "Children can't tell their reasons, but they've always got 'em!"

"Oh, no, they haven't," she laughed. And then she jumped, for there came a heavy booming of thunder from that part of the sky which the roof of the porch concealed from them. The sunshine over the pink-speckled garden vanished; all the blossoms lost color and grew wan, fluttering in an ominous breeze; at once a high wind whipped around the house and the row of straight poplars beyond the garden showed silver sides.

"*Luddie!*" shrieked Mrs. Thomas; and he shrieked in answer; came running, just ahead of the rain. She seized his hand, and fled with him into the house.

"You remember how afraid they are of lightning," said John apologetically. "Lightning and thunder. I never could understand it, but I suppose it's genuine and painful."

"It's both," the visitor remarked. "You wouldn't think I'm that way, too, would you?"

"You are?"

"Makes me nervous as a cat."

"Did you inherit it?"

"I don't think so," said Lucius; and he waved his host's silent offer of a cigar. "No, thanks. Never want to smoke in a thunderstorm. I—*Whoo!*" he interrupted himself, as a flare of light and a catastrophe of sound came simultaneously. "Let's go in," he said mildly.

"Not I. I love to watch it."

"Well—" Lucius paused, but at a renewal of the catastrophe, "*Excuse me!*" he said, and tarried no longer.

He found Mrs. Thomas and Ludlum in the center of the darkened drawing-room. She was sitting in a gilt chair with her feet off the floor, and upon a rung of the chair; and four heavy, flat-bottomed drinking-glasses were upon the floor, each of them containing the foot of a leg of the gilt chair. Ludlum was upon her lap.

"Don't you believe in insulation, Lucius?" she asked anxiously. "As long as we sit like this, we can't be struck, can we?"

He put on his glasses and gave her a solemn stare before replying. "I don't know about that," he said. "Of course John is safer out on the porch than we are in here."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "A porch is the most dangerous place there *is!*"

"I don't know whether or not he's safe from the lightning," Lucius explained. "I mean he's safe from being troubled about it the way we are."

"I don't call that being safe," his lady-cousin began. "I don't see what—"

But she broke off to find place for a subdued shriek, as an admiral's salute of great guns jarred the house. Other salutes followed, interjected, in spite of drawn shades and curtains, with spurts of light into the room, and at each spurt Mrs. Thomas shivered and said "Oh!" in a low voice,

whereupon Ludlum jumped and said "Ouch!" likewise in a low voice. Then, at the ensuing crash, Mrs. Thomas emitted a little scream, and Ludlum emitted a large one.

"Ouch! *Ow!*" he vociferated. "Mamma, I want it to stop! Mamma, I can't stand it! I can't *stand* it!"

"It's odd," said Lucius, during an interregnum. "The thunder frightens us more than the lightning, doesn't it?"

"They're both so horrible," she murmured. "I'm glad they affect you this way, too, Lucius. It's comforting. Do you think it's almost over?"

"I'll see," he said; and he went to a window, whither Ludlum, having jumped down, followed him.

"Don't open the curtains much," Mrs. Thomas begged, not leaving her chair. "Windows are always dangerous. And come away from the window, Luddie. The lightning might—"

She shrieked at a flash and boom, and Luddie came away from the window. Voiceless—he was so startled—he scrambled toward his mother, his arms outstretched, his feet slipping on the polished floor; then, leaping upon her lap, he clung to her wildly; gulped, choked, and found his voice. He howled.

"That was about the last, I think," observed Lucius, from the window. "It's beginning to clear already. Nothing but a shower to make things cooler for us. Let's go play with old John again. Come on, Luddie."

But Ludlum clung to his mother remonstrating. "No!" he cried. "Mamma, you got to stay in the house. I don't want to go out there. It might begin again!"

She laughed soothingly. "But Uncle Lucius says it's all over now, darling. Let's go and—"

"I *d'wan'* to! I won't go out of the house. You tell me a story."

"Well," she began, "once upon a time there was a good fairy and there was a bad fairy—"

"Where'd they live?"

"Oh, in a town—under some flowers in a garden in the town."

"Like our garden?"

"I suppose so," she assented. "And the good fairy—"

"Listen, mamma," said Ludlum. "If they lived in the garden like those fairies you were tellin' me about yesterday, they could come in the windows of the house where the pretty little boy lived, couldn't they?"

"I suppose so."

At this Ludlum's expression became apprehensive and his voice peevish. "Well, then," he complained, "if there was a window open at night, or just maybe through a crack under the door, the bad fairy could slip up behind the pretty little boy, or into the pretty little boy's bedroom, an'—"

"No, no!" his mother laughed, stroking his head. "You see, the good fairy would always be watching, too, and the good fairy wouldn't let the bad fairy hurt the pretty little boy."

The apprehensive expression was not altogether soothed from the pretty little boy's face. However, he said: "Go on. Tell what happened. Did the pretty little boy—"

"Lucius!" Mrs. Thomas exclaimed, "don't stay here to be bored by Luddie and me. I've got to tell him this story—"

"Yes," Ludlum eagerly agreed. "An' then afterward she has to read me a chapter in our book."

"So you go and make John tell *you* a story, Lucius. I have to be polite to Luddie because he's had such a fright, poor blessed child!"

Lucius was obedient: he rejoined John upon the porch, and the two men chatted for a time.

"What book is Jennie reading to the boy?" Mr. Allen inquired, after a subsequent interval of silence.

"I don't know just now. Classic fiction of some sort, probably. She's great on preparing his mind to be literary; reads an hour to him every day, and sometimes longer—translations—mythology—everything. All about gods and goddesses appearing out of the air to heroes, and Medusa heads and what not. Then standard works: Cooper, Bulwer, Scott, Hugo—some of the great romances."

"I see," said Lucius. "She always did go at things thoroughly. I remember," he went on, with a musing chuckle, "I remember how I got hold of Bulwer's *Zanoni* and *Strange Story* when I was about ten years old. By George! I've been afraid to go home in the dark ever since!"

"You have?" John smiled; then sent a serious and inquiring glance at the visitor, who remained placid. "Of course Jennie doesn't read *Zanoni* to Ludlum."

"No, she wouldn't," said Lucius. "Not till he's older. She'd read him much less disturbing things at his age, of course."

His host made no additional comment upon the subject, but appeared to sit in some perplexity.

Mr. Allen observed him calmly; then, after a time, went into the house—to get a cigar of his own, he said.

In the hall he paused, listening. From the library came Mrs. Thomas's voice, reading with fine dramatic fire:

"'What! thou frontless dastard, thou—thou who didst wait for opened gate and lowered bridge, when Conrad Horst forced his way over moat and wall, must *thou* be a malapert? Knit him up to the stanchions of the hall-window! He shall beat time with his feet while we drink a cup to his safe passage to the devil!'

"The doom was scarce sooner pronounced than accomplished; and in a moment the wretch wrested out his last

agonies, suspended from the iron bars. His body still hung there when our young hero entered the hall, and, intercepting the pale moonbeam, threw on the castle-floor an uncertain shadow, which dubiously yet fearfully intimated the nature of the substance which produced it.

“‘When the syndic—’”

Ludlum interrupted. “Mamma, what’s a stanchion?” His voice was low and a little husky.

“It’s a kind of an iron bar, or something, I think,” Mrs. Thomas answered. “I’m not sure.”

“Well, does it mean—mamma, what does it mean when it says ‘he wrested out his last annogies’?”

“‘Agonies,’ dear. It doesn’t mean anything that little boys ought to think about. This is a very unpleasant part of the book, and we’ll hurry on to where it’s all about knights and ladies, and pennons fluttering in the sunshine and—”

“No; I don’t want you to hurry. I like to hear this part, too. It’s nice. Go on, Mamma.”

She continued, and between the curtains at the door, Lucius caught a glimpse of them. Sunlight touched them through a window; she sat in a highbacked chair; the dark-curved boy, upon a stool, huddling to her knee; and, as they sat thus, reading *Quentin Durward*, they were like a mother and son in stained glass—or like a Countess, in an old romance, reading to the Young Heir. And Lucius Brutus Allen had the curious impression that, however dimly, both of them were conscious of some such picturesque resemblance.

Unseen, he withdrew from the renewed sound of the reading, and again went out to sit with John upon the porch, but Mrs. Thomas and Ludlum did not rejoin them until the announcement of dinner. When the meal was over, Lucius and his hostess played cribbage in the library; something they did at all their reunions—a commemoration of

an evening habit of old days. But tonight their game was interrupted, a whispering in the hall becoming more and more audible as it increased in virility; while protests on the part of a party of the second part punctuated and accented the whispering:

"I *d'wan'* to!" . . . "I won't!" . . .

"I *will* ast mammal!" . . . "Leggo!"

The whispering became a bass staccato, though subdued, under the breath; protests became monosyllabic, but increased in passion; short-clipped squealings and infantile grunts were heard—and then suddenly, yet almost deliberately, a wide-mouthed roar of human agony dismayed the echoing walls.

The cavern whence issued the horrid sound was the most conspicuous thing in the little world of that house, as Ludlum dashed into the library. Even in her stress of sympathy, the mother could not forbear to cry: "Don't, Luddie! Don't stretch your mouth like that! You'll spoil the shape of it."

But Ludlum cared nothing for shape. Open to all the winds, he plunged toward his mother; and cribbage-board, counters, and cards went to the floor.

"Darling!" she implored. "What has hurt mamma's little boy so awfully? Tell mammal!"

In her arms, his inclement eyes salting his cheeks, the vocal pitch of his despair rose higher and higher like the voice of a reluctant pump.

"*Papa twissud my wrist!*" he finally became coherent enough to declare.

"What!"

"He did!" All in falsetto Ludlum sobbed his version of things. "He—he *šuss*-said I had to gug-go up to bed all—all alone. He grabbed me! He hurt! He said I couldn't inter-rup' your ole gug-game! 'N' he said, 'I'll show you!' 'N' then—then—then—he *twissud my wrist!*"



At that she gathered him closer to her, and rose, holding him in her arms. Her face was deeply flushed, and her shining eyes avoided her husband, who stood near the doorway.

"Put him down, Jennie," he said mildly. "I—"

Straightway she strode by him, carrying her child. She did not pause, nor speak aloud, yet Lucius and John both heard the whispered word that crumpled the latter as the curtains waved with the angry breeze of her passing. "Shame!"

Meanwhile, Lucius, on his knees—for he never regarded his trousers seriously—began to collect dispersed cards and pegs. "What say?" he inquired upon some gaspings of his unfortunate friend, John.

"She believed it!" (These stricken words came from a deep chair in the shadows.) "She thought I actually did twist his wrist!"

"Oh, no," said Lucius. "She didn't believe anything of the kind. Darn that peg!" With face to the floor and in an attitude of Oriental devotion, he appeared to be worshipping the darkness under a divan. "She was merely reacting to the bellow of her offspring. She knew he invented it, as well as you did."

"It's incredible!" said John. "The cold-blooded cunning of it! He was bound to have his way, and make her go up with him; and I'd turned him toward the stair-way by his shoulders, and he tried to hold himself back by catching at one of those big chairs in the hall. I caught his wrist to keep him from holding to the chair—and I held him a second or two, not moving. The little pirate decided on the thing then and there, in his mind. He understood perfectly well he could make it all the more horrible because you were here, visiting us. I swear it appalls me! What sort of a nature *is* that?"

"Oh," said Lucius, "just natural nature. Same as you and me."

"I'd hate to believe that!"

"You and I got ashamed long ago of the tricks that came in our minds to play," said Lucius, groping under the divan. "We got ashamed so often that they don't come any more."

"Yes, but it ought to be time they stopped coming into that boy's mind. He was eight last month."

"Yes—darn that peg!—there seems to be something in what you say. But of course Luddie thought he was in a fix that was just as bad to him as it would be to me if somebody were trying to make me walk to Pancho Villa's camp all alone. *I'd* make a fuss about that, if the fuss would bring up the whole United States Army to go with me. That's what it amounted to with Luddie."

"I suppose so," groaned the father. "It all comes down to his being a coward."

"It all comes down to the air being full of queer things when he's alone," said Lucius.

"Well, I'd like to know what makes it full of queer things. Where does his foolishness come *from*?"

"And echo answers—" Lucius added, managing to get his head and shoulders under the divan, and thrusting with arms and legs to get more of himself under.

But a chime of laughter from the doorway answered in place of echo. "What are you doing, Lucius?" Mrs. Thomas inquired. "Swimming lessons? I never saw anything—" And laughter so overcame her that she could speak no further, but dropped into a chair, her handkerchief to her mouth.

Lucius emerged crabwise, and placed a cribbage-peg upon the table, but made no motion to continue the game. Instead he dusted himself uselessly, lit a cigar, and sat.

"Luddie's all right," said the lady, having recovered her

calmness. "I think probably something he ate at dinner upset him a little. Anyhow, he was all right as soon as he got upstairs. Annie's sitting with him and telling him stories."

"I wonder if that lightning struck anything this afternoon," Lucius said absently. "Some of it seemed mighty near."

"It was awful."

"Do you remember," Lucius asked her, "when you first began to be nervous about it?"

"Oh, I've always been that way, ever since I was a little child. I haven't the faintest idea how it got hold of me. Children just get afraid of certain things, it seems to me, and that's all there is to it. You know how Luddie is about lightning, John."

John admitted that he knew how Luddie was about lightning. "I do," was all he said.

Mrs. Thomas's expression became charmingly fond, even a little complacent. "I suppose he inherits it from me," she said.

"My mother has that fear to this day," Lucius remarked. "And I have it, too, but I didn't inherit it from her."

"How do you know?" his cousin asked quickly. "What makes you think you didn't inherit it?"

"Because my father used to tell me that when I was three and four years old he would sit out on the porch during a thunderstorm, and hold me in his lap, and every time the thunder came both of us would laugh, and shout 'Boom!' Children naturally like a big noise. But when I got a little bit older and more imaginative, and began to draw absurd conclusions from things, I found that my mother was frightened during thunderstorms—though she tried her best to conceal it—and, of course, seeing *her* frightened, I thought

something pretty bad must be the matter. So the fear got fastened on me, and I can't shake it off though I'm thirty-five years old. Curious thing it is!"

Mrs. Thomas's brilliant eyes were fixed upon her cousin throughout this narrative with an expression at first perplexed, then reproachful, finally hostile. A change, not subtle but simple and vivid, came upon her face, while its habitual mobility departed, leaving it radiantly still, with a fierce smoldering just underneath. How deep and fast her breathing became, was too easily visible.

"Everything's curious, though, for the matter of that," Lucius added. And without looking at his cousin—without needing to look at her, to understand the deadliness of her silence—he smoked unconcernedly. "Yes, sir, it's all curious; and *we're* all curious," he continued, permitting himself the indulgence of a reminiscent chuckle. "You know I believe my father and mother got to be rather at outs about me—one thing and another, goodness knows what!—and it was years before they came together and found a real sympathy between them again. Truth is, I suspect where people aren't careful, their children have about twice as much to do with driving 'em apart as with drawing 'em together—especially in the case of an only child. I really do think that if *I* hadn't been an only child my father and mother might have been—"

A sibilant breath, not a word and not quite a hiss, caused Lucius to pause for a moment, though not to glance in the direction of the lips whence came the sound. He appeared to forget the sentence he had left incomplete; at all events he neglected to finish it. However, he went on, composedly:

"Some of my aunts tell me I was the worst nuisance they ever knew. In fact, some of 'em go out of their way to tell me that, even yet. They never could figure out what was the matter with me—except that I was spoiled; but I never

meet Aunt Mira Hooper on the street at home, to this day, that she doesn't stop to tell me she hasn't learned to like me, because she got such a set against me when I was a child—and I meet her three or four times a week! She claims there was *some* kind of a little tragedy over me, in our house, every day or so, for years and years. She blames *me* for it, but Lord knows it wasn't my fault. For instance, a lot of it was my father's."

"What did he do?" asked John.

Lucius chuckled again. "The worst he did was to tell me stories about Indians and pioneer days. Sounds harmless enough, but father was a good story-teller, and that was the trouble. You see, the foundation of nearly all romance, whether it's Indian stories or fairy-stories—it's all hero and villain. Something evil is always just going to jump out of somewhere at the hero, and the reader or the listener is always the hero. Why, *I* got so I wouldn't go into a darkened room, even in the daytime! As we grow older we forget the horrible visions we had when we were children; and what's worse, we forget there's no need for children to have 'em. Children ought to be raised in the *real* world, not the dream one. Yes, sir, I lay all my Aunt Mira Hooper's grudge against me to my father's telling me stories so well and encouraging me to read the classics and—"

"Lucius," Mrs. Thomas spoke in a low voice, but in a tone that checked him abruptly.

"Yes, Jennie?"

"Don't you think that's enough?"

"I suppose it is tiresome," he said. "Too much autobiography. I was just rambling on about—"

"You meant me!" she cried.

"You, Jennie?"

"You did! And you meant Ludlum was a 'nuisance'; not you. And I don't think it's very nice! Do you?"

"Why, I nev—"

But his cousin's emotions were no longer to be controlled. She rose, trembling. "What a fool I was this afternoon!" she exclaimed bitterly. "I didn't suspect you; yet I never remembered your being nervous in a thunderstorm before. I thought you were sympathetic, and all the time you were thinking these cruel, wicked things 'bout Luddie and me!"

Lucius rose, too. "You know what I think about you, all the time, Jennie," he said genially. "John, if you can remember where you put my umbrella when we came in, it's about time for me to be catching a street-car down to the station."

She opposed him with a passionate gesture. "No!" she cried fiercely. "You can't say such things to me and then slip out like that! You tell me I've taught my child to be a coward and that I've made a spoilt brat of him—"

"Jennie!" he protested. "I was talking about *me*!"

"Shame on you to pretend!" she said. "You think I'm making John *hate* Luddie—"

"*Jennie!*" he shouted in genuine astonishment.

"You do! And you come here pretending to be such a considerate, sympathetic friend—and every minute you're criticizing and condemning me in your heart for all my little stories to my child—all because—because"—suddenly she uttered a dry sob—"because I want to raise my boy to be a—a poet!"

"John," said Lucius desperately, "*do* you think you can find that umbrella?"

With almost startling alacrity John rose and vanished from the room, and Lucius would have followed, but the distressed lady detained him. She caught a sagging pocket of his coat, and he found it necessary to remain until she should release him.

"You sha'n't!" she cried. "Not till you've taken back that accusation."

"But what accusa—"

"Shame on you! Ah, I didn't think you'd ever come here and do such a thing to me. And this morning I was looking forward to a happy day! It's a good thing you're a bachelor!"

With which final insult she hurled his pocket from her—at least that was the expression of her gesture—and sank into a chair, weeping heart-brokenly. "You don't understand!" she sobbed. "How could any man understand—or any woman not a mother. You think these hard things of me, but—but John doesn't always love Luddie. Don't you get even a little glimpse of what that means to me? There are times when John doesn't even *like* Luddie!"

"Take care," said Lucius gently. "Take care that those times don't come oftener."

She gasped, and would have spoken, but for a moment she could not, and was able only to gaze at him fiercely through her tears. Yet there was a hint of fear behind the anger.

"You dare to say such a thing as that to a mother?" she said, when she could speak.

Lucius's eyes twinkled genially; he touched her upon the shoulder, and she suffered him. "Mother," he said lightly, "have pity on your child!" Somehow, he managed to put more solemnity into this parting prayer of his than if he had spoken it solemnly; and she was silent.

Then he left the room, and, on his way, stumbled over a chair, as he usually did at the dramatic moments in his life.

John was standing in the open doorway, Lucius's umbrella in his hand. "I think I hear a car coming, old fellow," he said.

"Got to get my hat," Mr. Allen muttered. He had been reminded of something; a small straw hat, with a blue ribbon round it, was upon the table, and he fumbled with it a moment before seizing his own and rushing for the door at the increasing warning of a brass gong in the near distance. Thus, when he had gone, a silver dollar was pocketed within the inside band of the small straw hat with the blue ribbon. . . . John Thomas, returning in sharp trepidation to the lovely, miserable figure in the library, encountered one of the many surprises of his life.

"He never could tell the truth to save his life!" she said. "He doesn't know what truth *means*! Did you hear him sitting up there and telling us he was 'an only child'? He has a brother and four sisters living, and I don't know how many dead!"

"You don't mean it!" said John, astounded. "That certainly was pecu—"

He lost his breath at that moment. She rose and threw her arms round him with the utmost heartiness. "He's such an old smart Aleck!" she cried, still weeping. "That's why I married you instead of him. I love you for not being one! If you want to spank Luddie for telling that story about his wrist I wish you'd go and wake him up and do it!"

"No," said John. "Lucius called to me as he was running for the car that he's going to be married next week. I'll wait and spank one of his children. They'll be the worst spoiled children in the world!"





## THE RED HAT<sup>1</sup>

BY MORLEY CALLAGHAN

*Since he had been out of work he had been moody and discontented. She thought now with pleasure of pleasing him by wearing something that would give her a new kind of elegance, of making him feel cheerful and proud of her and glad, after all, they were married. But the hat cost fifteen dollars. And her salary for the week was eighteen. . . .*

It was the kind of hat Frances had wanted for months, a plain little red felt hat with the narrow brim tacked back, which would look so smart and simple and expensive. There was really very little to it, it was so plain, but it was the kind of hat that would have made her feel confident of a sleek appearance. She stood on the pavement, her face pressed close against the shop window, a slender, tall, and good-looking girl wearing a reddish woolen dress clinging tightly to her body. On the way home from work, the last three evenings, she had stopped to look at the hat. And when she had got home she had told Mrs. Foley, who lived in the next apartment, how much the little hat appealed to her. In the window were many smart hats, all very expensive. There was only one red felt hat, on a mannequin head with a silver face and very red lips.

Though Frances stood by the window a long time she had no intention of buying the hat, because her husband

<sup>1</sup> From *The Best Short Stories of 1932*, edited by E. J. O'Brien (New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1932). Reprinted by permission of the author.

was out of work and they couldn't afford it; she was waiting for him to get a decent job so she could buy clothes for herself. Not that she looked shabby, but the fall weather was a little cold, a sharp wind sometimes blowing gustily up the avenue, and in the twilight, on the way home from work with the wind blowing, she knew she ought to be wearing a light coat. In the early afternoon when the sun was shining brightly she looked neat and warm in her woolen dress.

Though she ought to have been on her way home Frances couldn't help standing there, thinking she might look beautiful in this hat, if she went out with Eric, her husband, for the evening. Since he had been so moody and discontented recently she now thought with pleasure of pleasing him by wearing something that would give her a new kind of elegance, of making him feel cheerful and proud of her and glad, after all, that they were married.

But the hat cost fifteen dollars. She had eighteen dollars in her purse, her salary for the week. It was ridiculous for her to be there looking at the hat, which was obviously too expensive for her, so she smiled and walked away, putting both hands in the small pockets of her dress. She walked slowly, glancing at two women who were standing at the other end of the big window. One of the two women, the younger one, wearing a velvet coat trimmed with squirrel, said to the other: "Let's go in and try some of them on."

Hesitating and half turning, Frances thought it would be quite harmless and amusing if she went into the shop and tried on the red hat, just to see if it looked as good on her as it did on the mannequin head. It never occurred to her to buy the hat.

In the shop she walked on soft, thick, gray carpet to the chair by the window, where she sat alone for a few moments,

waiting for one of the saleswomen to come to her. At one of the mirrors an elderly lady with bleached hair was fussing with many hats and talking jerkily to a deferential and patient saleswoman. Frances, looking at the big dominant woman with the bleached hair and the expensive clothes, felt embarrassed, because she thought it ought to be apparent to every one in the shop, by the expression on her face, that she had no intention of taking a hat.

A deep-bosomed saleswoman, splendidly corseted, and wearing black silk, smiled at Frances, appraising her carefully. Frances was the kind of customer who might look good in any one of the hats. At the same time, while looking at her, the saleswoman wondered why she wasn't wearing a coat, or at least carrying one, for the evenings were often chilly.

"I wanted to try on the little hat, the red one in the window," Frances said.

The saleswoman had decided by this time that Frances intended only to amuse herself by trying on hats, so when she took the hat from the window and handed it to Frances she merely smiled politely and watched her adjusting it on her head. Frances tried the hat and patted a strand of fair hair till it curled by the side of the brim. And then, because she was delighted to see that it was as attractive on her as it had been on the mannequin head with the silver face, she smiled happily, noticing in the mirror that her face was the shape of the mannequin face, a little long and narrow, the nose fine and firm, and she took out her lipstick and marked her lips heavily. Looking in the glass again she felt elated and seemed to enjoy a kind of freedom. She felt elegant and a little haughty. Then she saw in the mirror the image of the deep-bosomed and polite saleslady.

"It is nice, isn't it?" Frances said, wishing suddenly that she hadn't come into the store.

"It is wonderfully becoming to you, especially to you."

And Frances said suddenly: "I suppose I could change it, if my husband didn't like it?"

"Of course."

"Then I'll take it."

Even while paying for the hat and assuring herself that it would be amusing to take it home for the evening, she had a feeling that she ought to have known when she first came into the store that she intended to take the hat home. The saleswoman was smiling warmly. Frances, no longer embarrassed, thought with pleasure of going out with Eric and wearing the hat, without detaching the price tag. In the morning she could return it.

But as she walked out of the store there was a hope way down within her that Eric would find her so charming in the red hat he would insist she keep it. She wanted him to be freshly aware of her, to like the hat, to discover its restrained elegance. And when they went out together for the evening they would both share the feeling she had had when first she had looked in the shop window. Frances, carrying the box, hurried, eager to get home. The sharp wind had gone down. When there was no wind on these fall evenings it was not cold and she would not have to wear a coat with her woolen dress. It was just about dark now and all the lights were lit in the streets.

The stairs in the apartment house were long, and on other evenings very tiring, but to-night she seemed to be breathing lightly as she opened the door. Her husband, Eric, was sitting by the table lamp, reading the paper. A black-haired man with a well-shaped nose, he seemed utterly without energy, slumped down in the chair. A slight odor of whiskey came from him. For four months he had been out of work and some of the spirit had gone out of him, as if he felt that he could never again have independence,

and most of the afternoon he had been standing in the streets by the theatres, talking with actors who were out of work.

"Hello, Eric boy," she said, kissing him on the head. He hardly looked up.

"'Lo, Frances," he said.

"Let's go out and eat to-night," she said.

"What with?"

"Two bucks, big boy, a couple of dollar dinners."

So far he had hardly looked at her. She went into the bedroom and took the hat out of the box, adjusting it on her head at the right angle, powdering her nose and smiling cheerfully. Jauntily she walked into the living room, swinging her hips a little and trying not to smile too openly.

"Take a look at the hat, Eric. How would you like to step out with me?"

Smiling faintly, he said: "You look snappy, but you can't afford a hat."

"Never mind that. How do you like it?"

"What's the use if you can't keep it?"

"But hasn't it got class? Did you ever see anything look so good on me?"

"Was it bargain day somewhere?"

"Bargain day! I got it at one of the best shops in town. Fifteen bucks."

"You'd bother looking at fifteen-dollar hats with me out of work," he said angrily, getting up and glaring at her morosely.

"I would."

"Sure. It's your money. You do what you want."

Frances felt hurt, as if for months there had been a steady pressure on her, and she said stubbornly: "I paid for it. Of course, I can take it back if you insist."

"If I insist," he said, getting up slowly and sneering at

her as though he had been hating her for months. "If I insist. And you know how I feel about the whole business."

Frances felt hurt and yet strong from indignation, so she shrugged her shoulders. "I wanted to wear it to-night," she said.

His face was white, his eyes almost closed. Suddenly he grabbed hold of her by the wrist, twisting it till she sank down on one knee. "You'll get rid of that hat quickly, or I'll break every bone in your body; then I'll clear out of here for good."

"Don't, Eric, please don't."

"You've been keeping me, haven't you?"

"Don't hurt me, Eric."

"Get your fifteen-dollar hat out of my sight quick. Get rid of it, or I'll get out of here for good."

"I will, Eric."

As he let go her wrist he snatched the hat from her head, pulling it, twisting it in his hands, then throwing it on the floor. He kicked it far across the room. "Get it out of here quick, or we're through," he said.

All the indignation had gone out of Frances. She was afraid of him; afraid, too, that he would suddenly rush out of the room and never come back, for she knew he had thought of doing it before. Picking up the hat she caressed the soft felt with her fingers, though she could hardly see it with her eyes filled with tears. The felt was creased, the price tag had been torn off, leaving a tiny tear at the back.

Eric, who kept on wetting his lips, was sitting there, watching her.

The hat was torn and she could not take it back. Hurriedly she put it in the box, wrapping the tissue paper around it, and then she went along the hall to Mrs. Foley's apartment.

Mrs. Foley, a smiling, fat woman with a round, cheerful face, opened the door. She saw Frances was agitated and felt sorry for her. "Frances, dear, what's the matter with you?"

"You remember the hat I was telling you about? Here it is. It doesn't look good on me. I was disappointed and pulled it off my head and there's a tiny tear in it. Maybe you'd want it."

Mrs. Foley thought at once that Frances had been quarrelling with her husband. Mrs. Foley held up the hat and looked at it shrewdly. Then she went back into her bedroom and tried it on. The felt was good, and though it had been creased, it was quite smooth now. "Of course, I never pay more than five dollars for a hat," she said. The little felt hat did not look good on her round head and face. She was sure that Frances was trying to sell the hat cheaply just to irritate her husband.

"I hate to offer you five dollars for it, Frances, but . . ."

"All right. Give me five dollars."

As Mrs. Foley took the five dollars from her purse Frances said suddenly: "Listen, dear, if I want it back next week you sell it to me for five, will you?"

"Sure I will, kid."

Frances hurried back to her own apartment. Though she knew Eric could not have gone out while she was standing in the hall, she kept saying to herself: "Please, Heaven, please don't let me do anything to make him leave me while he's feeling this way."

Eric, with his arms folded across his chest, was looking out the window.

Frances put the five dollars Mrs. Foley had given her, and the three dollars left over from her salary, on the small table by Eric's chair. "I sold it to Mrs. Foley," she said.

"Thanks," he said, without looking at her.

"Eric, I'm absolutely satisfied," she said, softly and sincerely.

"All right, I'm sorry," he said briefly.

"I mean I don't know what makes you think I'm not satisfied—that's all," she said.

Sitting beside him she put her elbow on her knee and thought of the felt hat on Mrs. Foley's head: it did not look good on her; her face was not at all the shape of the long silver face of the mannequin head. And as Frances thought of the way the hat had looked on the mannequin head in the window she hoped vaguely that something would turn up so she could get it back from Mrs. Foley by the end of the week. And just thinking of it, sitting there, she felt an eagerness and a faint elation; it was a plain little red hat, the kind of hat she had wanted for months, elegant and expensive, a plain felt hat, but so very distinctive.





## THE GAY OLD DOG<sup>1</sup>

BY EDNA FERBER

*A bachelor, who sacrificed his chance for a normal family life to care for his three sisters, tries to make up for what he has missed.*

THOSE of you who have dwelt—or even lingered—in Chicago, Illinois (this is not a humorous story), are familiar with the region known as the Loop. For those others of you to whom Chicago is a transfer point between New York and San Francisco there is presented this brief explanation:

The Loop is a clamorous, smoke-infested district embraced by the iron arms of the elevated tracks. In a city boasting fewer millions, it would be known familiarly as downtown. From Congress to Lake Street, from Wabash almost to the river, those thunderous tracks make a complete circle, or loop. Within it lie the retail shops, the commercial hotels, the theaters, the restaurants. It is the Fifth Avenue (diluted) and the Broadway (deleted) of Chicago. And he who frequents it by night in search of amusement and cheer is known, vulgarly, as a loop-hound.

Jo Hertz was a loop-hound. On the occasion of those sparse first nights granted the metropolis of the Middle West he was always present, third row, aisle, left. When a new loop café was opened, Jo's table always commanded an unobstructed view of anything worth viewing. On entering he was wont to say, "Hello, Gus," with careless cordiality

<sup>1</sup> From *Cheerful by Request* by Edna Ferber (New York, Doubleday, Page and Co., 1918). Reprinted by permission of the author.

to the head-waiter, the while his eye roved expertly from table to table as he removed his gloves. He ordered things under glass, so that his table, at midnight or thereabouts, resembled a hot-bed that favors the bell system. The waiters fought for him. He was the kind of man who mixes his own salad dressing. He liked to call for a bowl, some cracked ice, lemon, garlic, paprika, salt, pepper, vinegar and oil, and make a rite of it. People at near-by tables would lay down their knives and forks to watch, fascinated. The secret of it seemed to lie in using all the oil in sight and calling for more.

That was Jo—a plump and lonely bachelor of fifty. A plethoric, roving-eyed and kindly man, clutching vainly at the garments of a youth that had long slipped past him. Jo Hertz, in one of those pinch-waist belted suits and a trench coat and a little green hat, walking up Michigan Avenue of a bright winter's afternoon, trying to take the curb with a jaunty youthfulness against which every one of his fat-encased muscles rebelled, was a sight for mirth or pity, depending on one's vision.

The gay-dog business was a late phase in the life of Jo Hertz. He had been a quite different sort of canine. The staid and harassed brother of three unwed and selfish sisters is an under dog. The tale of how Jo Hertz came to be a loop-hound should not be compressed within the limits of short story. It should be told as are the photoplays, with frequent throw-backs and many cut-ins. To condense twenty-three years of a man's life into some five or six thousand words requires a verbal economy amounting to parsimony.

At twenty-seven Jo had been the dutiful, hard-working son (in the wholesale harness business) of a widowed and gummidging mother, who called him Joey. If you had looked close you would have seen that now and then a

double wrinkle would appear between Jo's eyes—a wrinkle that had no business there at twenty-seven. Then Jo's mother died, leaving him handicapped by a death-bed promise, the three sisters and a three-story-and-basement house on Calumet Avenue. Jo's wrinkle became a fixture.

Death-bed promises should be broken as lightly as they are seriously made. The dead have no right to lay their clammy fingers upon the living.

"Joey," she had said, in her high, thin voice, "take care of the girls."

"I will, ma," Jo had choked.

"Joey," and the voice was weaker, "promise me you won't marry till the girls are all provided for." Then as Jo had hesitated, appalled: "Joey, it's my dying wish. Promise!"

"I promise, ma," he had said.

Whereupon his mother had died, comfortably, leaving him with a completely ruined life.

They were not bad-looking girls, and they had a certain style, too. That is, Stell and Eva had. Carrie, the middle one, taught school over on the West Side. In those days it took her almost two hours each way. She said the kind of costume she required should have been corrugated steel. But all three knew what was being worn, and they wore it—or fairly faithful copies of it. Eva, the housekeeping sister, had a needle knack. She could skim the State Street windows and come away with a mental photograph of every separate tuck, hem, yoke, and ribbon. Heads of departments showed her the things they kept in drawers, and she went home and reproduced them with the aid of a two-dollar-a-day seamstress. Stell, the youngest, was the beauty. They called her Babe. She wasn't really a beauty, but some one had once told her that she looked like Janice Meredith (it was when that work of fiction was at the height of its popularity). For years afterward, whenever she went to parties, she af-

fectured a single, fat curl over her right shoulder, with a rose stuck through it.

Twenty-three years ago one's sisters did not strain at the household leash, nor crave a career. Carrie taught school, and hated it. Eva kept house expertly and complainingly. Babe's profession was being the family beauty, and it took all her spare time. Eva always let her sleep until ten.

This was Jo's household, and he was the nominal head of it. But it was an empty title. The three women dominated his life. They weren't consciously selfish. If you had called them cruel they would have put you down as mad. When you are the lone brother of three sisters, it means that you must constantly be calling for, escorting, or dropping one of them somewhere. Most men of Jo's age were standing before their mirror of a Saturday night, whistling blithely and abstractedly while they discarded a blue polka-dot for a maroon tie, whipped off the maroon for a shot-silk in favor of a plain black-and-white, because she had once said she preferred quiet ties. Jo, when he should have been preening his feathers for conquest, was saying:

"Well, my God, I *am* hurrying! Give a man time, can't you? I just got home. You girls have been laying around the house all day. No wonder you're ready."

He took a certain pride in seeing his sisters well dressed, at a time when he should have been reveling in fancy waistcoats and brilliant-hued socks, according to the style of that day, and the inalienable right of any unwed male under thirty, in any day. On those rare occasions when his business necessitated an out-of-town trip, he would spend half a day floundering about the shops, selecting handkerchiefs, or stockings, or feathers, or fans, or gloves for the girls. They always turned out to be the wrong kind, judging by their reception.

From Carrie, "What in the world do I want of a fan!"

"I thought you didn't have one," Jo would say.

"I haven't. I never go to dances."

Jo would pass a futile hand over the top of his head, as was his way when disturbed. "I just thought you'd like one. I thought every girl liked a fan. Just," feebly, "just to—to have."

"Oh, for pity's sake!"

And from Eva or Babe, "I've *got* silk stockings, Jo." Or, "You brought me handkerchiefs the last time."

There was something selfish in his giving, as there always is in any gift freely and joyfully made. They never suspected the exquisite pleasure it gave him to select these things; these fine, soft, silken things. There were many things about this slow-going, amiable brother of theirs that they never suspected. If you had told them he was a dreamer of dreams, for example, they would have been amused. Sometimes, dead-tired by nine o'clock, after a hard day downtown, he would doze over the evening paper. At intervals he would wake, red-eyed, to a snatch of conversation such as, "Yes, but if you get a blue you can wear it anywhere. It's dressy, and at the same time it's quiet, too." Eva, the expert, wrestling with Carrie over the problem of the new spring dress. They never guessed that the commonplace man in the frayed old smoking-jacket had banished them all from the room long ago; had banished himself, for that matter. In his place was a tall, debonair, and rather dangerously handsome man to whom six o'clock spelled evening clothes. The kind of a man who can lean up against a mantel, or propose a toast, or give an order to a man-servant, or whisper a gallant speech in a lady's ear with equal ease. The shabby old house on Calumet Avenue was transformed into a brocaded and chandeliered rendezvous for the brilliance of the city. Beauty was there, and wit. But none so beautiful and witty as She. Mrs.—er—Jo Hertz. There was wine, of course; but

no vulgar display. There was music; the soft sheen of satin; laughter. And he the gracious, tactful host, king of his own domain—

“Jo, for heaven’s sake, if you’re going to snore go to bed!”

“Why—did I fall asleep?”

“You haven’t been doing anything else all evening. A person would think you were fifty instead of thirty.”

And Jo Hertz was again just the dull, gray, commonplace brother of three well-meaning sisters.

Babe used to say petulantly, “Jo, why don’t you ever bring home any of your men friends? A girl might as well not have a brother, all the good you do.”

Jo, conscience-stricken, did his best to make amends. But a man who has been petticoat-ridden for years loses the knack, somehow, of comradeship with men. He acquires, too, a knowledge of women, and a distaste for them, equaled only, perhaps, by that of an elevator-starter in a department store.

Which brings us to one Sunday in May. Jo came home from a late Sunday afternoon walk to find company for supper. Carrie often had in one of her school-teacher friends, or Babe one of her frivolous intimates, or even Eva a staid guest of the old-girl type. There was always a Sunday night supper of potato salad, and cold meat, and coffee, and perhaps a fresh cake. Jo rather enjoyed it, being a hospitable soul. But he regarded the guests with the undazzled eyes of a man to whom they were just so many petticoats, timid of the night streets and requiring escort home. If you had suggested to him that some of his sisters’ popularity was due to his own presence, or if you had hinted that the more kitenish of these visitors were palpably making eyes at him, he would have stared in amazement and unbelief.

This Sunday night it turned out to be one of Carrie’s friends.

"Emily," said Carrie, "this is my brother, Jo."

Jo had learned what to expect in Carrie's friends. Drab-looking women in the late thirties, whose facial lines all slanted downward.

"Happy to meet you," said Jo, and looked down at a different sort altogether. A most surprisingly different sort, for one of Carrie's friends. This Emily person was very small, and fluffy, and blue-eyed, and sort of—well, crinkly looking. You know. The corners of her mouth when she smiled, and her eyes when she looked up at you, and her hair, which was brown, but had the miraculous effect, somehow, of being golden.

Jo shook hands with her. Her hand was incredibly small, and soft, so that you were afraid of crushing it, until you discovered she had a firm little grip all her own. It surprised and amused you, that grip, as does a baby's unexpected clutch on your patronizing forefinger. As Jo felt it in his own big clasp, the strangest thing happened to him. Something inside Jo Hertz stopped working for a moment, then lurched sickeningly, then thumped like mad. It was his heart. He stood staring down at her, and she up at him, until the others laughed. Then their hands fell apart, lingeringly.

"Are you a school-teacher, Emily?" he said.

"Kindergarten. It's my first year. And don't call me Emily, please."

"Why not? It's your name. I think it's the prettiest name in the world." Which he hadn't meant to say at all. In fact, he was perfectly aghast to find himself saying it. But he meant it.

At supper he passed her things, and stared, until everybody laughed again, and Eva said acidly, "Why don't you feed her?"

It wasn't that Emily had an air of helplessness. She just

made you feel you wanted her to be helpless, so that you could help her.

Jo took her home, and from that Sunday night he began to strain at the leash. He took his sisters out, dutifully, but he would suggest, with a carelessness that deceived no one, "Don't you want one of your girl friends to come along? That little What's-her-name—Emily, or something. So long's I've got three of you, I might as well have a full squad."

For a long time he didn't know what was the matter with him. He only knew he was miserable, and yet happy. Sometimes his heart seemed to ache with an actual physical ache. He realized that he wanted to do things for Emily. He wanted to buy things for Emily—useless, pretty, expensive things that he couldn't afford. He wanted to buy everything that Emily needed, and everything that Emily desired. He wanted to marry Emily. That was it. He discovered that one day, with a shock, in the midst of a transaction in the harness business. He stared at the man with whom he was dealing until that startled person grew uncomfortable.

"What's the matter, Hertz?"

"Matter?"

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost or found a gold mine. I don't know which."

"Gold mine," said Jo. And then, "No. Ghost."

For he remembered that high, thin voice, and his promise. And the harness business was slithering downhill with dreadful rapidity, as the automobile business began its amazing climb. Jo tried to stop it. But he was not that kind of business man. It never occurred to him to jump out of the down-going vehicle and catch the up-going one. He stayed on, vainly applying brakes that refused to work.

"You know, Emily, I couldn't support two households now. Not the way things are. But if you'll wait. If you'll



only wait. The girls might—that is, Babe and Carrie—”

She was a sensible little thing, Emily. “Of course I’ll wait. But we mustn’t just sit back and let the years go by. We’ve got to help.”

She went about it as if she were already a little match-making matron. She corraled all the men she had ever known and introduced them to Babe, Carrie, and Eva separately, in pairs, *en masse*. She arranged parties at which Babe could display the curl. She got up picnics. She stayed home while Jo took the three about. When she was present she tried to look as plain and obscure as possible, so that the sisters should show up to advantage. She schemed, and planned, and contrived, and hoped; and smiled into Jo’s despairing eyes.

And three years went by. Three precious years. Carrie still taught school, and hated it. Eva kept house, more and more complainingly as prices advanced and allowance retreated. Stell was still Babe, the family beauty; but even she knew that the time was past for curls. Emily’s hair, somehow, lost its glint and began to look just plain brown. Her crinkliness began to iron out.

“Now, look here!” Jo argued, desperately, one night. “We could be happy, anyway. There’s plenty of room at the house. Lots of people begin that way. Of course, I couldn’t give you all I’d like to at first. But maybe, after a while—”

No dreams of salons, and brocade, and velvet-footed servants, and satin damask now. Just two rooms, all their own, all alone, and Emily to work for. That was his dream. But it seemed less possible than that other absurd one had been.

You know that Emily was as practical a little thing as she looked fluffy. She knew women. Especially did she know Eva, and Carrie, and Babe. She tried to imagine herself taking the household affairs and the housekeeping pocket-

book out of Eva's expert hands. Eva had once displayed to her a sheaf of aigrettes she had bought with what she saved out of the housekeeping money. So then she tried to picture herself allowing the reins of Jo's house to remain in Eva's hands. And everything feminine and normal in her rebelled. Emily knew she'd want to put away her own freshly laundered linen, and smooth it, and pat it. She was that kind of woman. She knew she'd want to do her own delightful haggling with butcher and vegetable peddler. She knew she'd want to muss Jo's hair, and sit on his knee, and even quarrel with him, if necessary, without the awareness of three ever-present pairs of maiden eyes and ears.

"No! No! We'd only be miserable. I know. Even if they didn't object. And they would, Jo. Wouldn't they?"

His silence was miserable assent. Then, "But you do love me, don't you, Emily?"

"I do, Jo. I love you—and love you—and love you. But, Jo, I—can't."

"I know it, dear. I knew it all the time, really. I just thought, maybe, somehow—"

The two sat staring for a moment into space, their hands clasped. Then they both shut their eyes, with a little shudder, as though what they saw was terrible to look upon. Emily's hand, the tiny hand that was so unexpectedly firm, tightened its hold on his, and his crushed the absurd fingers until she winced with pain.

That was the beginning of the end, and they knew it.

Emily wasn't the kind of a girl who would be left to pine. There are too many Jo's in the world whose hearts are prone to lurch and then thump at the feel of a soft, fluttering, incredibly small hand in their grip. One year later Emily was married to a young man whose father owned a large, pie-shaped slice of the prosperous state of Michigan.

That being safely accomplished, there was something

grimly humorous in the trend taken by affairs in the old house on Calumet. For Eva married. Of all people, Eva Married well, too, though he was a great deal older than she. She went off in a hat she had copied from a French model at Field's, and a suit she had contrived with a home dressmaker, aided by pressing on the part of the little tailor in the basement over on Thirty-first Street. It was the last of that, though. The next time they saw her, she had on a hat that even she would have despaired of copying, and a suit that sort of melted into your gaze. She moved to the North Side (trust Eva for that), and Babe assumed the management of the household on Calumet Avenue. It was rather a pinched little household now, for the harness business shrank and shrank.

"I don't see how you can expect me to keep house decently on this!" Babe would say contemptuously. Babe's nose, always a little inclined to sharpness, had whittled down to a point of late. "If you knew what Ben gives Eva."

"It's the best I can do, Sis. Business is something rotten."

"Ben says if you had the least bit of—" Ben was Eva's husband, and quotable, as are all successful men.

"I don't care what Ben says," shouted Jo, goaded into rage. "I'm sick of your everlasting Ben. Go and get a Ben of your own, why don't you, if you're so stuck on the way he does things."

And Babe did. She made a last desperate drive, aided by Eva, and she captured a rather surprised young man in the brokerage way, who had made up his mind not to marry for years and years. Eva wanted to give her her wedding things, but at that Jo broke into sudden rebellion.

"No, sir! No Ben is going to buy my sister's wedding clothes, understand? I guess I'm not broke—yet. I'll furnish the money for her things, and there'll be enough of them, too."

Babe had as useless a trousseau, and as filled with extravagant pink-and-blue and lacy and frilly things as any daughter of doting parents. Jo seemed to find a grim pleasure in providing them. But it left him pretty well pinched. After Babe's marriage (she insisted that they call her Estelle now) Jo sold the house on Calumet. He and Carrie took one of those little flats that were springing up, seemingly overnight, all through Chicago's South Side.

There was nothing domestic about Carrie. She had given up teaching two years before, and had gone into Social Service work on the West Side. She had what is known as a legal mind, hard, clear, orderly, and she made a great success of it. Her dream was to live at the Settlement House and give all her time to the work. Upon the little household she bestowed a certain amount of grim, capable attention. It was the same kind of attention she would have given a piece of machinery whose oiling and running had been entrusted to her care. She hated it, and didn't hesitate to say so.

Jo took to prowling about department store basements, and household goods sections. He was always sending home a bargain in a ham, or a sack of potatoes, or fifty pounds of sugar, or a window clamp, or a new kind of paring knife. He was forever doing odd little jobs that the janitor should have done. It was the domestic in him claiming its own.

Then, one night, Carrie came home with a dull glow in her leathery cheeks, and her eyes alight with resolve. They had what she called a plain talk.

"Listen, Jo. They've offered me the job of first assistant resident worker. And I'm going to take it. Take it! I know fifty other girls who'd give their ears for it. I go in next month."

They were at dinner. Jo looked up from his plate, dully. Then he glanced around the little dining room, with its ugly tan walls and its heavy dark furniture (the Calumet

Street pieces fitted clumsily into the five-room flat).

"Away? Away from here, you mean—to live?"

Carrie laid down her fork. "Well, really, Jo! After all that explanation."

"But to go over there to live! Why, that neighborhood's full of dirt, and disease, and crime, and the Lord knows what all. I can't let you do that, Carrie."

Carrie's chin came up. She laughed a short little laugh. "Let me! That's eighteenth-century talk, Jo. My life's my own to live. I'm going."

And she went. Jo stayed on in the apartment until the lease was up. Then he sold what furniture he could, stored or gave away the rest, and took a room on Michigan Avenue in one of the old stone mansions whose decayed splendor was being put to such purpose.

Jo Hertz was his own master. Free to marry. Free to come and go. And he found he didn't even think of marrying. He didn't even want to come or go, particularly. A rather frumpy old bachelor, with thinning hair and a thickening neck. Much has been written about the unwed, middle-aged woman; her fussiness, her primness, her angularity of mind and body. In the male that same fussiness develops, and a certain primness, too. But he grows flabby where she grows lean.

Every Thursday evening he took dinner at Eva's, and on Sunday noon at Stell's. He tucked his napkin under his chin and openly enjoyed the home-made soup and the well-cooked meats. After dinner he tried to talk business with Eva's husband, or Stell's. His business talks were the old-fashioned kind, beginning:

"Well, now, looka here. Take, f'rinstance, your raw hides and leathers."

But Ben and George didn't want to take f'rinstance your raw hides and leathers. They wanted, when they took any-

thing at all, to take golf, or politics, or stocks. They were the modern type of business man who prefers to leave his work out of his play. Business, with them, was a profession—a finely graded and balanced thing, differing from Jo's clumsy, downhill style as completely as does the method of a great criminal detective differ from that of a village constable. They would listen, restively, and say "Uh-hur" at intervals, and at the first chance they would sort of fade out of the room, with a meaning glance at their wives. Eva had two children now. Girls. They treated Uncle Jo with good-natured tolerance. Stell had no children. Uncle Jo degenerated, by almost imperceptible degrees, from the position of honored guest, who is served with white meat, to that of one who is content with a leg and one of those obscure bony sections which, after much turning with a bewildered and investigating knife and fork, leave one baffled and unsatisfied.

Eva and Stell got together and decided that Jo ought to marry.

"It isn't natural," Eva told him. "I never saw a man who took so little interest in women."

"Me!" protested Jo almost shyly. "Women!"

"Yes. Of course. You act like a frightened school-boy."

So they had in for dinner certain friends and acquaintances of fitting age. They spoke of them as "splendid girls." Between thirty-six and forty. They talked awfully well, in a firm, clear way, about civics, and classes, and politics, and economics, and boards. They rather terrified Jo. He didn't understand much that they talked about, and he felt humbly inferior, and yet a little resentful, as if something had passed him by. He escorted them home, dutifully, though they told him not to bother, and they evidently meant it. They seemed capable, not only of going home quite unattended, but of delivering a pointed lecture

to any highwayman or brawler who might molest them.

The following Thursday Eva would say, "How did you like her, Jo?"

"Like who?" Jo would spar feebly.

"Miss Matthews."

"Who's she?"

"Now, don't be funny, Jo. You know very well I mean the girl who was here for dinner. The one who talked so well on the emigration question."

"Oh, her! Why, I liked her, all right. Seems to be a smart woman."

"Smart! She's a perfectly splendid girl."

"Sure." Jo would agree cheerfully.

"But didn't you like her?"

"I can't say I did, Eve. And I can't say I didn't. She made me think a lot of a teacher I had in the fifth reader. Name of Himes. As I recall her, she must have been a fine woman. But I never thought of her as a woman at all. She was just Teacher."

"You make me tired," snapped Eva impatiently. "A man of your age. You don't expect to marry a girl, do you? A child!"

"I don't expect to marry anybody," Jo had answered.

And that was the truth, lonely though he often was.

The following year Eva moved to Winnetka. Any one who got the meaning of the Loop knows the significance of a move to a north shore suburb, and a house. Eva's daughter, Ethel, was growing up, and her mother had an eye on society.

That did away with Jo's Thursday dinner. Then Stell's husband bought a car. They went out into the country every Sunday. Stell said it was getting so that maids objected to Sunday dinners, anyway. Besides, they were unhealthy, old-fashioned things. They always meant to ask

Jo to come along, but by the time their friends were placed, and the lunch, and the boxes, and sweaters, and George's camera, and everything, there seemed to be no room for a man of Jo's bulk. So that eliminated the Sunday dinners.

"Just drop in any time during the week," Stell said, "for dinner. Except Wednesday—that's our bridge night—and Saturday. And, of course, Thursday. Cook is out that night. Don't wait for me to 'phone."

And so Jo drifted into that sad-eyed, dyspeptic family made up of those you see dining in second-rate restaurants, their paper propped up against the bowl of oyster crackers, munching solemnly and with indifference to the stare of the passer-by surveying them through the brazen plate-glass window.

And then came the War. The war that spelled death and destruction to millions. The war that brought a fortune to Jo Hertz, and transformed him, over night, from a baggy-kneed old bachelor whose business was a failure to a prosperous manufacturer whose only trouble was the shortage in hides for the making of his product—leather! The armies of Europe called for it. Harnesses! More harnesses! Straps! Million of straps! More! More!

The musty old harness business over on Lake Street was magically changed from a dust-covered, dead-alive concern to an orderly hive that hummed and glittered with success. Orders poured in. Jo Hertz had inside information on the War. He knew about troops and horses. He talked with French and English and Italian buyers—noblemen, many of them—commissioned by their countries to get American-made supplies. And now, when he said to Ben or George, "Take frinstance your raw hides and leathers," they listened with respectful attention.

And then began the gay dog business in the life of Jo



Hertz. He developed into a loop-hound, ever keen on the scent of fresh pleasure. That side of Jo Hertz which had been repressed and crushed and ignored began to bloom, unhealthily. At first he spent money on his rather contemptuous nieces. He sent them gorgeous fans, and watch bracelets, and velvet bags. He took two expensive rooms at a downtown hotel, and there was something more tear-compelling than grotesque about the way he gloated over the luxury of a separate ice-water tap in the bathroom. He explained it.

"Just turn it on. Ice-water! Any hour of the day or night."

He bought a car. Naturally. A glittering affair; in color a bright blue, with pale-blue leather straps and a great deal of gold fittings and wire wheels. Eva said it was the kind of a thing a soubrette would use, rather than an elderly business man. You saw him driving about in it, red-faced and rather awkward at the wheel. You saw him, too, in the Pompeiian room at the Congress Hotel of a Saturday afternoon when doubtful and roving-eyed matrons in kolinsky capes are wont to congregate to sip pale amber drinks. Actors grew to recognize the semi-bald head and the shining, round, good-natured face looming out at them from the dim well of the parquet, and sometimes, in a musical show, they directed a quip at him, and he liked it. He could pick out the critics as they came down the aisle, and even had a nodding acquaintance with two of them.

"Kelly, of the *Herald*," he would say carelessly. "Bean, of the *Trib*. They're all afraid of him."

So he frolicked, ponderously. In New York he might have been called a Man About Town.

And he was lonesome. He was very lonesome. So he searched about in his mind and brought from the dim past the memory of the luxuriously\*furnished establishment of which he used to dream in the evenings when he dozed over

his paper in the old house on Calumet. So he rented an apartment, many-roomed and expensive, with a man-servant in charge, and furnished it in styles and periods ranging through all the Louis. The living room was mostly rose color. It was like an unhealthy and bloated boudoir. And yet there was nothing sybaritic or uncleanly in the sight of this paunchy, middle-aged man sinking into the rosy-cushioned luxury of his ridiculous home. It was a frank and naïve indulgence of long-starved senses, and there was in it a great resemblance to the rolling-eyed ecstasy of a school-boy smacking his lips over an all-day sucker.

The War went on, and on, and on. And the money continued to roll in—a flood of it. Then, one afternoon, Eva, in town on shopping bent, entered a small, exclusive, and expensive shop on Michigan Avenue. Exclusive, that is, in price. Eva's weakness, you may remember, was hats. She was seeking a hat now. She described what she sought with a languid conciseness, and stood looking about her after the saleswoman had vanished in quest of it. The room was becomingly rose-illuminated and somewhat dim, so that some minutes had passed before she realized that a man seated on a raspberry brocade settee not five feet away—a man with a walking stick, and yellow gloves, and tan spats, and a check suit—was her brother Jo. From him Eva's wild-eyed glance leaped to the woman who was trying on hats before one of the many long mirrors. She was seated, and a saleswoman was exclaiming discreetly at her elbow.

Eva turned sharply and encountered her own saleswoman returning, hat-laden. "Not to-day," she gasped. "I'm feeling ill. Suddenly." And almost ran from the room.

That evening she told Stell, relating her news in that telephone pidgin-English devised by every family of married sisters as protection against the neighbors and Central. Translated, it ran thus:

"He looked straight at me. My dear, I thought I'd die! But at least he had sense enough not to speak. She was one of those limp, willowy creatures with the greediest eyes that she tried to keep softened to a baby stare, and couldn't, she was so crazy to get her hands on those hats. I saw it all in one awful minute. You know the way I do. I suppose some people would call her pretty; I don't. And her color! Well! And the most expensive-looking hats. Aigrettes, and paradise, and feathers. Not one of them under seventy-five. Isn't it disgusting! At his age! Suppose Ethel had been with me!"

The next time it was Stell who saw them. In a restaurant. She said it spoiled her evening. And the third time it was Ethel. She was one of the guests at a theater party given by Nicky Overton II. You know. The North Shore Overtons. Lake Forest. They came in late, and occupied the entire third row at the opening performance of "Believe Me!" And Ethel was Nicky's partner. She was glowing like a rose. When the lights went up after the first act Ethel saw that her Uncle Jo was seated just ahead of her with what she afterward described as a Blonde. Then her uncle had turned around, and, seeing her, had been surprised into a smile that spread genially all over his plump and rubicund face. Then he had turned to face forward again, quickly.

"Who's the old bird?" Nicky had asked. Ethel had pretended not to hear, so he had asked again.

"My uncle," Ethel answered, and flushed all over her delicate face, and down to her throat. Nicky had looked at the Blonde, and his eyebrows had gone up ever so slightly.

It spoiled Ethel's evening. More than that, as she told her mother of it later, weeping, she declared it had spoiled her life.

Eva talked it over with her husband in that intimate, kimonoed hour that precedes bedtime. She gesticulated heatedly with her hair brush.

"It's disgusting, that's what it is. Perfectly disgusting. There's no fool like an old fool. Imagine! A creature like that. At his time of life."

There exists a strange and loyal kinship among men. "Well, I don't know," Ben said now, and even grinned a little. "I suppose a boy's got to sow his wild oats some time."

"Don't be any more vulgar than you can help," Eva retorted. "And I think you know, as well as I, what it means to have that Overton boy interested in Ethel."

"If he's interested in her," Ben blundered, "I guess the fact that Ethel's uncle went to the theater with some one who wasn't Ethel's aunt won't cause a shudder to run up and down his frail young frame, will it?"

"All right," Eva had retorted. "If you're not man enough to stop it, I'll have to, that's all. I'm going up there with Stell this week."

They did not notify Jo of their coming. Eva telephoned his apartment when she knew he would be out, and asked his man if he expected his master home to dinner that evening. The man had said yes. Eva arranged to meet Stell in town. They would drive to Jo's apartment together, and wait for him there.

When she reached the city Eva found turmoil there. The first of the American troops to be sent to France were leaving. Michigan Boulevard was a billowing, surging mass: Flags, pennants, bands, crowds. All the elements that make for demonstration. And over the whole—quiet. No holiday crowd, this. A solid, determined mass of people waiting patient hours to see the khaki-clads go by. Three years of indefatigable reading had brought them to a clear knowledge of what these boys were going to.

"Isn't it dreadful!" Stell gasped.

"Nicky Overton's only nineteen, thank goodness."

Their car was caught in the jam. When they moved at all it was by inches. When at last they reached Jo's apartment they were flushed, nervous, apprehensive. But he had not yet come in. So they waited.

No, they were not staying to dinner with their brother, they told the relieved houseman. Jo's home has already been described to you. Stell and Eva, sunk in rose-colored cushions, viewed it with disgust, and some mirth. They rather avoided each other's eyes.

"Carrie ought to be here," Eva said. They both smiled at the thought of the austere Carrie in the midst of those rosy cushions, and hangings, and lamps. Stell rose and began to walk about, restlessly. She picked up a vase and laid it down; straightened a picture. Eva got up, too, and wandered into the hall. She stood there a moment, listening. Then she turned and passed into Jo's bedroom. And there you knew Jo for what he was.

This room was as bare as the other had been ornate. It was Jo, the clean-minded and simple-hearted, in revolt against the cloying luxury with which he had surrounded himself. The bedroom, of all rooms in any house, reflects the personality of its occupant. True, the actual furniture was paneled, cupid-surmounted, and ridiculous. It had been the fruit of Jo's first orgy of the senses. But now it stood out in that stark little room with an air as incongruous and ashamed as that of a pink tarleton danseuse who finds herself in a monk's cell. None of those wall-pictures with which bachelor bedrooms are reputed to be hung. No satin slippers. No scented notes. Two plain-backed military brushes on the chiffonier (and he so nearly hairless!). A little orderly stack of books on the table near the bed. Eva fingered their titles and gave a little gasp. One of them was on gardening. "Well, of all things!" exclaimed Stell. A book on the War, by an Englishman. A detective story of

the lurid type that lulls us to sleep. His shoes ranged in a careful row in the closet, with shoe-trees in every one of them. There was something speaking about them. They looked so human. Eva shut the door on them, quickly. Some bottles on the dresser. A jar of pomade. An ointment such as a man uses who is growing bald and is panic-stricken too late. An insurance calendar on the wall. Some rhubarb-and-soda mixture on the shelf in the bathroom, and a little box of pepsin tablets.

"Eats all kinds of things at all hours of the night," Eva said, and wandered out into the rose-colored front room again with the air of one who is chagrined at her failure to find what she has sought. Stell followed her, furtively.

"Where do you suppose he can be?" she demanded. "It's—" she glanced at her wrist, "why, it's after six!"

And then there was a little click. The two women sat up, tense. The door opened. Jo came in. He blinked a little. The two women in the rosy room stood up.

"Why—Eve! Why, Babe! Well! Why didn't you let me know?"

"We were just about to leave. We thought you weren't coming home."

Jo came in, slowly. "I was in the jam on Michigan, watching the boys go by." He sat down, heavily. The light from the window fell on him. And you saw that his eyes were red.

And you'll have to learn why. He had found himself one of the thousands in the jam on Michigan Avenue, as he said. He had a place near the curb, where his big frame shut off the view of the unfortunates behind him. He waited with the placid interest of one who has subscribed to all the funds and societies to which a prosperous, middle-aged business man is called upon to subscribe in war time. Then, just as he was about to leave, impatient at the delay, the crowd had

cried, with a queer dramatic, exultant note in its voice, "Here they come! Here come the boys!"

Just at that moment two little, futile, frenzied fists began to beat a mad tattoo on Jo Hertz's broad back. Jo tried to turn in the crowd, all indignant resentment. "Say, looka here!"

The little fists kept up their frantic beating and pushing. And a voice—a choked, high little voice—cried, "Let me by! I can't see! You man, you! You big fat man! My boy's going by—to war—and I can't see! Let me by!"

Jo scrooged around, still keeping his place. He looked down. And upturned to him in agonized appeal was the face of little Emily. They stared at each other for what seemed a long, long time. It was really only the fraction of a second. Then Jo put one great arm firmly around Emily's waist and swung her around in front of him. His great bulk protected her. Emily was clinging to his hand. She was breathing rapidly, as if she had been running. Her eyes were straining up the street.

"Why, Emily, how in the world—!"

"I ran away. Fred didn't want me to come. He said it would excite me too much."

"Fred?"

"My husband. He made me promise to say good-bye to Jo at home."

"Jo?"

"Jo's my boy. And he's going to war. So I ran away. I had to see him. I had to see him go."

She was dry-eyed. Her gaze was straining up the street.

"Why, sure," said Jo. "Of course you want to see him." And then the crowd gave a great roar. There came over Jo a feeling of weakness. He was trembling. The boys went marching by.

"There he is," Emily shrilled, above the din. "There

he is! There he is! There he—" And waved a futile little hand. It wasn't so much a wave as a clutching. A clutching after something beyond her reach.

"Which one? Which one, Emily?"

"The handsome one. The handsome one. There!" Her voice quavered and died.

Jo put a steady hand on her shoulder. "Point him out," he commanded. "Show me." And the next instant, "Never mind. I see him."

Somehow, miraculously, he had picked him from among the hundreds. Had picked him as surely as his own father might have. It was Emily's boy. He was marching by, rather stiffly. He was nineteen, and fun-loving, and he had a girl, and he didn't particularly want to go to France and—to go to France. But more than he had hated going, he had hated not to go. So he marched by, looking straight ahead, his jaw set so that his chin stuck out just a little. Emily's boy.

Jo looked at him, and his face flushed purple. His eyes, the hard-boiled eyes of a loop-hound, took on the look of a sad old man. And suddenly he was no longer Jo, the sport; old J. Hertz, the gay dog. He was Jo Hertz, thirty, in love with life, in love with Emily, and with the stinging blood of young manhood coursing through his veins.

Another minute and the boy had passed on up the broad street—the fine, flag-bedecked street—just one of a hundred service-hats bobbing in rhythmic motion like sandy waves lapping a shore and flowing on.

Then he disappeared altogether.

Emily was clinging to Jo. She was mumbling something over and over. "I can't. I can't. Don't ask me to. I can't let him go. Like that. I can't."

Jo said a queer thing.

"Why, Emily! We wouldn't have him stay home, would we? We wouldn't want him to do anything different, would



we? Not our boy. I'm glad he volunteered. I'm proud of him. So are you, glad."

Little by little he quieted her. He took her to the car that was waiting, a worried chauffeur in charge. They said good-bye, awkwardly. Emily's face was a red, swollen mass.

So it was that when Jo entered his own hallway half an hour later he blinked, dazedly, and when the light from the window fell on him you saw that his eyes were red.

Eva was not one to beat about the bush. She sat forward in her chair, clutching her bag rather nervously.

"Now, look here, Jo. Stell and I are here for a reason. We're here to tell you that this thing's got to stop."

"Thing? Stop?"

"You know very well what I mean. You saw me at the milliner's that day. And night before last, Ethel. We're all disgusted. If you must go about with people like that, please have some sense of decency."

Something gathering in Jo's face should have warned her. But he was slumped down in his chair in such a huddle, and he looked so old and fat that she did not heed it. She went on. "You've got us to consider. Your sisters. And your nieces. Not to speak of your own—"

But he got to his feet then, shaking, and at what she saw on his face even Eva faltered and stopped. It wasn't at all the face of a fat, middle-aged sport. It was a face Jovian, terrible.

"You!" he began, low-voiced, ominous. "You!" He raised a great fist high. "You two murderers! You didn't consider me, twenty years ago. You come to me with talk like that. Where's my boy! You killed him, you two, twenty years ago. And now he belongs to somebody else. Where's my son that should have gone marching by to-day?" He flung his arms out in a great gesture of longing. The red veins stood out on his forehead. "Where's my son? Answer me that, you two

selfish, miserable women. Where's my son?" Then, as they huddled together, frightened, wild-eyed: "Out of my house! Out of my house! Before I hurt you!"

They fled, terrified. The door banged behind them.

Jo stood, shaking, in the center of the room. Then he reached for a chair, gropingly, and sat down. He passed one moist, flabby hand over his forehead and it came away wet. The telephone rang. He sat still. It sounded far away and unimportant, like something forgotten. I think he did not even hear it with his conscious ear. But it rang and rang insistently. Jo liked to answer his telephone when at home.

"Hello!" He knew instantly the voice at the other end.

"That you, Jo?" it said.

"Yes."

"How's my boy?"

"I'm—all right."

"Listen, Jo. The crowd's coming over to-night. I've fixed up a little poker game for you. Just eight of us."

"I can't come to-night, Gert."

"Can't! Why not?"

"I'm not feeling so good."

"You just said you were all right."

"I *am* all right. Just kind of tired."

The voice took on a cooing note. "Is my Joey tired? Then he shall be all comfy on the sofa, and he doesn't need to play if he doesn't want to. No, sir."

Jo stood staring at the black mouth-piece of the telephone. He was seeing a procession go marching by. Boys, hundreds of boys, in khaki.

"Hello! Hello!" the voice took on an anxious note. "Are you there?"

"Yes," wearily.

"Jo, there's something the matter. You're sick. I'm coming right over."

"No!"

"Why not? You sound as if you'd been sleeping. Look here—"

"Leave me alone!" cried Jo, suddenly, and the receiver clacked onto the hook. "Leave me alone. Leave me alone." Long after the connection had been broken.

He stood staring at the instrument with unseeing eyes. Then he turned and walked into the front room. All the light had gone out of it. Dusk had come on. All the light had gone out of everything. The zest had gone out of life. The game was over—the game he had been playing against loneliness and disappointment. And he was just a tired old man. A lonely, tired old man in a ridiculous, rose-colored room that had grown, all of a sudden, drab.



## MY FATHER SITS IN THE DARK<sup>1</sup>

BY JEROME WEIDMAN

*What can it be? I review all the possibilities. It can't be money, I know that. We haven't much but when father is worried about money he makes no secret of it. It can't be his health. He is not reticent about that either. We are a bit short on money but we are long on health. What can it be?*

My father has a peculiar habit. He is fond of sitting in the dark, alone. Sometimes I come home very late. The house is dark. I let myself in quietly because I do not want to disturb my mother. She is a light sleeper. I tiptoe into my room and undress in the dark. I go to the kitchen for a drink of water. My bare feet make no noise. I step into the room and almost trip over my father. He is sitting in a kitchen chair, in his pajamas, smoking his pipe.

"Hello, Pop," I say.

"Hello, son."

"Why don't you go to bed, Pa?"

"I will," he says.

But he remains there. Long after I am asleep I feel sure that he is still sitting there, smoking.

Many times I am reading in my room. I hear my mother get the house ready for the night. I hear my kid brother go to bed. I hear my sister come in. I hear her do things with

<sup>1</sup> From *Story Magazine*, November, 1934. Reprinted by permission of *Story Magazine*.

jars and combs until she, too, is quiet. I know she has gone to sleep. In a little while I hear my mother say good night to my father. I continue to read. Soon I become thirsty. (I drink a lot of water.) I go to the kitchen for a drink. Again I almost stumble across my father. Many times it startles me. I forget about him. And there he is—smoking, sitting, thinking.

"Why don't you go to bed, Pop?"

"I will, son."

But he doesn't. He just sits there and smokes and thinks. It worries me. I can't understand it. What can he be thinking about? Once I asked him.

"What are you thinking about, Pa?"

"Nothing," he said.

Once I left him there and went to bed. I awoke several hours later. I was thirsty. I went to the kitchen. There he was. His pipe was out. But he sat there, staring into a corner of the kitchen. After a moment I became accustomed to the darkness. I took my drink. He still sat and stared. His eyes did not blink. I thought he was not even aware of me. I was afraid.

"Why don't you go to bed, Pop?"

"I will, son," he said. "Don't wait up for me."

"But," I said, "you've been sitting here for hours. What's wrong? What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing, son," he said. "Nothing. It's just restful. That's all."

The way he said it was convincing. He did not seem worried. His voice was even and pleasant. It always is. But I could not understand it. How could it be restful to sit alone in an uncomfortable chair far into the night, in darkness?

What can it be?

I review all the possibilities. It can't be money. I know

that. We haven't much, but when he is worried about money he makes no secret of it. It can't be his health. He is not reticent about that either. It can't be the health of anyone in the family. We are a bit short on money, but we are long on health. (Knock wood, my mother would say.) What can it be? I am afraid I do not know. But that does not stop me from worrying.

Maybe he is thinking of his brothers in the old country. Or of his mother and two step-mothers. Or of his father. But they are all dead. And he would not brood about them like that. I say brood, but it is not really true. He does not brood. He does not even seem to be thinking. He looks too peaceful, too, well not contented, just too peaceful, to be brooding. Perhaps it is as he says. Perhaps it is restful. But it does not seem possible. It worries me.

If I only knew what he thinks about. If I only knew that he thinks at all. I might not be able to help him. He might not even need help. It may be as he says. It may be restful. But at least I would not worry about it.

Why does he just sit there, in the dark? Is his mind failing? No, it can't be. He is only fifty-three. And he is just as keen-witted as ever. In fact, he is the same in every respect. He still likes beet soup. He still reads the second section of the *Times* first. He still wears wing collars. He still believes that Debs could have saved the country and that T.R. was a tool of the moneyed interests. He is the same in every way. He does not even look older than he did five years ago. Everybody remarks about that. Well-preserved, they say. But he sits in the dark, alone, smoking, staring straight ahead of him, unblinking, into the small hours of the night.

If it is as he says, if it is restful, I will let it go at that. But suppose it is not. Suppose it is something I cannot fathom. Perhaps he needs help. Why doesn't he speak? Why doesn't

he frown or laugh or cry? Why doesn't he do something? Why does he just sit there?

Finally I become angry. Maybe it is just my unsatisfied curiosity. Maybe I *am* a bit worried. Anyway, I become angry.

"Is something wrong, Pop?"

"Nothing, son. Nothing at all."

But this time I am determined not to be put off. I am angry.

"Then why do you sit here all alone, thinking, till late?"

"It's restful, son. I like it."

I am getting nowhere. Tomorrow he will be sitting there again. I will be puzzled. I will be worried. I will not stop now. I am angry.

"Well, what do you *think* about, Pa? Why do you just sit here? What's worrying you? What do you think about?"

"Nothing's worrying me, son. I'm all right. It's just restful. That's all. Go to bed, son."

My anger has left me. But the feeling of worry is still there. I must get an answer. It seems so silly. Why doesn't he tell me? I have a funny feeling that unless I get an answer I will go crazy. I am insistent.

"But what do you *think* about, Pa? What is it?"

"Nothing, son. Just things in general. Nothing special. Just things."

I can get no answer.

It is very late. The street is quiet and the house is dark. I climb the steps softly, skipping the ones that creak. I let myself in with my key and tiptoe into my room. I remove my clothes and remember that I am thirsty. In my bare feet I walk to the kitchen. Before I reach it I know he is there.

I can see the deeper darkness of his hunched shape. He

is sitting in the same chair, his elbows on his knees, his cold pipe in his teeth, his unblinking eyes staring straight ahead. He does not seem to know I am there. He did not hear me come in. I stand quietly in the doorway and watch him.

Everything is quiet, but the night is full of little sounds. As I stand there motionless I begin to notice them. The ticking of the alarm clock on the icebox. The low hum of an automobile passing many blocks away. The swish of papers moved along the street by the breeze. A whispering rise and fall of sound, like low breathing. It is strangely pleasant.

The dryness in my throat reminds me. I step briskly into the kitchen.

"Hello, Pop," I say.

"Hello, son," he says. His voice is low and dream-like. He does not change his position nor shift his gaze.

I cannot find the faucet. The dim shadow of light that comes through the window from the street lamp only makes the room seem darker. I reach for the short chain in the center of the room. I snap on the light.

He straightens up with a jerk, as though he has been struck. "What's the matter, Pop?" I ask.

"Nothing," he says sharply. "Only put out the light."

"What's the matter with the light?" I say. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," he says. "I don't like the light."

I snap the light off. I drink my water slowly. I must take it easy, I say to myself. I must get to the bottom of this.

"Why don't you go to bed? Why do you sit here so late in the dark?"

"It's nice," he says. "I can't get used to lights. We didn't have lights when I was a boy in Europe."

My heart skips a beat and I catch my breath happily. I



begin to think I understand. I remember the stories of his boyhood in Austria. I see the wide-beamed *kretchma*, with my grandfather behind the bar. It is late, the customers are gone, and he is dozing. I see the bed of glowing coals, the last of the roaring fire. The room is already dark, and growing darker. I see a small boy, crouched on a pile of twigs at one side of the huge fireplace, his starry gaze fixed on the dull remains of the dead flames. The boy is my father.

I remember the pleasure of those few moments while I stood quietly in the doorway watching him.

"You mean there's nothing wrong? You just sit in the dark because you like it, Pop?" I find it hard to keep my voice from rising in a happy shout.

"Sure," he says. "I can't think with the light on."

I set my glass down and turn to go back to my room. "Good night, Pop," I say.

"Good night," he says.

Then I remember. I turn back. "What do you think about, Pop?" I ask.

His voice seems to come from far away. It is quiet and even again. "Nothing," he says softly. "Nothing special."



## AT SUNDOWN <sup>1</sup>

BY WILLIAM SAROYAN

*I would see Myra and she would see me, and that would be the end of it. I mean, it was enough for each of us to know that the other lived, and it was somehow such a vast significance to us that even after all these years I still have to laugh, remembering her and myself as we were then.*

I HAVE to laugh, remembering this girl Varanzoff, who was like nothing else I have seen alive, bird and flower and field and brook, all implied in her strange reality, and at night, walking with her through the city, I used to wonder if it was true, the earth, our city, this girl, and myself, and under the light of street lamps I could not tell if she walked with me through a time of life, or if somehow, because of knowing her, I had gotten myself wholly out of the earth and out of time, since it seemed to me that never before had there been a love so timeless, so essentially without beginning and end, and never again would be.

I have to laugh, remembering all that I have forgotten, because I have forgotten the frantic need I felt in those days to know a truth of life more magnificent than any truth I now know, a truth I once dreamed of acquiring, with this girl Myra, and learned I could never acquire, since I was mortal, no less than she, and then, in despair and despera-

<sup>1</sup> From *Inhale and Exhale* by William Saroyan. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc., New York.

tion, buying a new suit of clothes for my body, which was all that was left of me, the rest crumbling into the death of this need, and a new hat, and filling my heart and mind with a new set of ideas about the way of life, a less magnificent but more plausible set.

My amusement now infuriates this death in myself, and the laughter of my body stumbles before the bitter grief of my dead heart, and I remember dimly this strange longing I once had which soon became tragic, quietly in the heart where all great tragedies occur, my amazing wish to walk out of the earth with this little Russian girl, since the earth was ugly and full of death, and it seemed that we were not ugly and could never die. And when I knew that it could not be, or that we could earn deathlessness only by accepting and walking into mortal death, I became scornful, laughing at the absurd longing, forgetting it, staying alive, putting on new clothes.

More than anywhere else, more certainly than upon the surface of the earth, it seemed that she and I lived, as one life, herself and myself as one new life, in the depths of music, where there was precision and accuracy, and it was music we had heard together, at concerts, and music we had heard together, being together, that had never been written or played by an orchestra.

And it was therefore incredible to me that our reality was only the reality of substance, of flesh and blood and bone, our mortality on earth, our shaped and animated substance in the city, of the time, Myra's clothed body and my own, and each of these bodies helplessly wanting morning on earth, the day of our beginning, the day of the coming of time, to prove our timelessness, and walking with her each evening I would be sick and speechless with this boyish longing, and we would walk for hours all over the city, trying to understand what we could think or hope for, since

we loved one another so much, and what the meaning of such a love could be.

I was young, but I was not so very young, because when a man has endured twenty years he imagines he has lived a long time, from the beginning of the earth to the latest moment of breathing, and he has felt a lot of history of one sort or another squirming up through his blood and becoming a part of his identity, solidifying in his bones, and I remember I did not feel at all young. I was demanding of my own private mortality the fulfilment, real and whole and not merely idealistic, of a desire definitely of *my* life, and Myra's, and therefore a desire I could not ignore. I know I did not want to evade it, and simply lie with her and be done with it, because then I would have had to admit that living was ineffectual because I hadn't the strength to impose magnificence upon it, and not because it was so anyway, which I finally had to suppose, perhaps deceiving myself.

I do not know why these amazing longings still occur in new lives, when experience has long since proven their futility and danger, but they do still occur, and there must be some reason, and I have an idea they are universal and everlasting, inevitable events of growth, slowly or swiftly pushed aside, as the case may be, since they lead only to the most profound of sorrows, or to death itself, and never, I am afraid, to the magnificence they awaken in the heart and furiously demand, because, perhaps, in the nature of things we are, after all, rather puny, and rather weak, and much too easily adapted to the earth, and to the limitations of mortality.

At any rate, earlier in life I had known desire of another sort, and had not felt the ineffectuality of these evanescent longings, when they had been fulfilled, because I myself had wanted and expected and demanded no more than what

I had received, and because I had been only partly formed, and only partly myself. Now, with Myra I was still only partly myself, and still only partly formed, but now there was this difference: that I was tormented by these hopes of magnificence and could never, seemingly, be satisfied with anything less, unless it was death itself, because I had touched whores and died in one night and found myself alive again, and a little ill, the next morning, and Myra was not one of these and with her I meant to gain life, not death, and I meant to gain my wholeness, my full identity.

I used to wonder what I would do if, even with Myra, the answer was to be death and ineffectuality, and afterward a most cowardly and humiliating deception of self, and a weakly acceptance of the next best thing, and it seemed to me that I would prefer to be utterly dead, wholly effaced, completely without remembrance and hope. Knowing her, I could not bring myself to believe our love was no more than what had happened innumerable times before and would certainly continue to happen to the end of time, and there were long summer nights when, after having walked with her for hours and returned to my small room, I could not sleep and would dream wakefully of another earth and another mortality, a place of greater beauty, and a life of greater power and precision, and I have to laugh at this, because I remember I used to insist that it *could* be and that it *would* be, or I would not care to live at all.

Before the coming of Myra, I had been clumsy and awkward and sentimental and vulgar, and now and then I had been shy, or foolish, or timid, in the presence, late at night, of the nude female body, and always, after I had mocked myself by demanding no meaning of my having life, and another having it, I would go down dark and foul-smelling stairways to the city street, and there blink or swear or tell myself it was glorious, really marvelous, knowing all the

same that this fidgetiness could not be the truth of mortality, that certainly it *was* not, and wondering what could be the truth, and where I would ever find some one I could love without my body and mind being confused by a lot of cheap and embarrassing emotions.

Of the nudity of Myra I had seen only face and neck and arm and hand, but a face is much, being the essence and reflection of all the rest, and the loveliness of arm, white and smooth, and the poise of hand, and the glance of eye: these are much, and from seeing what was unclothed of her I knew, almost more truthfully than if I had seen her wholly apart from the imposed costume of the day and place, the beauty of Myra herself, inward as much as outward, the quiet but lithe spirit sweetly shaped in the whiteness of flesh, and wanting much of meaning and grace in this incredible and to me miraculous knowing of one another, I could not often touch even her hand, fearing that unless each of us understood the beauty and significance of this ordinarily innocent gesture of communion the entire configuration of our longing would be disastrously brought to ruin.

I mean, I wanted Myra and myself, as one, to be one gloriously, and I was afraid to touch her hand, I was afraid it would lift us out of the strange place we had entered and place us again in the midst of the ugliness of the earth, and I didn't want this to happen, and I think Myra didn't want it to happen. We were always asking one another where we might go to be alone, but what we meant perhaps was where we might go to be out of the contemporary ugliness, and it was sad when we would have to decide on a walk along the waterfront, along Embarcadero, and then on to the Marina, which are actually only places, and less than what we were seeking.

Myra's father was a small tailor whose shop was on Town-

send Street, near where I worked as a clerk in the office of a coffee importer, and I knew him months before I knew Myra. I used to visit his shop once a week, after work, to have my suit pressed, or a button sewed on, and while I stood behind the curtain of a corner of the room, I used to carry on a loud and to me amusing conversation with him, since I enjoyed hearing him speak English with a very interesting Russian accent. He regarded me, I think, as one of those remarkable young men who, out of sheer nervousness and impatience, thrust themselves into the activities of life at an early age, and try to make a lot of money. At any rate, I used to kid him a lot, and he knew he was being kidded, but he was always friendly and liked to see me. And I liked seeing him. To amuse myself, I used to ask him if he could honestly say I was handsome, and he would consider the question very seriously, and then reply, Well, not so handsome, but a good young man. Which always pleased me because I knew how really large my ears were and how melancholy my expression.

One Saturday afternoon I was standing behind this curtain, shouting at Mr. Varanzoff, when I heard the door of his shop open, and being curious peeped from behind the curtain and saw Myra. For the love of Mike, I said. Who is this? Then I heard the old man and Myra speaking quietly, at the old man's suggestion, since there was a customer in the shop, behind the curtain, in Russian, and I don't know what happened, I simply understood I would want to break my neck to know this girl.

The old man brought me my suit, and I put it on, trying desperately to think of something to say to the girl. I came from behind the curtain, neatly buttoned all over, perfectly conventional, but wholly delirious with the strange feeling Myra's voice had sent through my body and mind. She is unlike any one alive, I kept saying to myself, and finally,

after paying her father for the work he had done, I said to her, trying to seem at ease, trying to look into her face without blinking, What is your name?

It was a stupid question, but I couldn't help it.

Myra, she said.

I couldn't think of anything more to say, because it was not easy to be so near her and to look into her eyes, so I turned to her father, trying to be the bright young man I imagined he thought me to be.

Is this your daughter? I said.

I was amazed that so lovely a person might be the daughter of this quiet old man, and even after he had said that she was his daughter, I could not believe it, and I remember that I felt, Well, she is really no one's daughter: that just happened, the way such things do.

The old man introduced us. I don't know why, unless it was that I hung around, not leaving the store.

Myra, he said, this is:

Carl Hofmann, I said. I am an Austrian.

An Austrian? said the old man. I didn't know that. I thought you were an American.

Oh, sure, I said. I was born here, on the other side of town. My people are dead. I do not speak the language, but you know what I mean.

I was talking like a fool, wanting Myra to know where I was from, all the facts of my beginning, and I went on telling the old man, and Myra, about my school-days and how miserable I always felt and how anxious to get out of school.

I left school last year, I said proudly. I have been working a whole year. My aunt does not support me any longer.

And still I did not go away. The old man became embarrassed by my presence, but it seemed to me that Myra, although she did not speak, only smiled and paid close atten-



tion to everything I said, did not mind my staying, and probably even wanted me to stay.

We left the shop together, and I walked with her to old man Varanzoff's house, almost three miles away. Myra said she would have taken a street car, but it was a pleasant evening and if I really wanted to walk, well, certainly, she wanted to, too. I saw the house where she was living, and it was a drab place, and I couldn't picture her in such a place. It seemed incredible. How could such a flower emerge from this place? I asked myself.

I suppose it was all boyish silliness, but whatever it was it was miraculous to me, and going away from her, walking to my own room, I began to wonder how such things came about. There I was in that small room, of the time, and somehow not of it, and there was Myra in her father's house, and somehow it seemed to me neither of us belonged where we were, and I began to wonder where we *did* belong.

Afterward, she came every afternoon to her father's shop, and we began walking together, my mood and feeling about her slowly becoming her mood and feeling about me, and finally the two becoming one, while each of us remained wholly apart, my hand hardly ever touching the hand of Myra. We went to dinner together at French and Italian restaurants in the North Beach. We went to symphonies and operas, and sometimes even to movies, and slowly this strange longing in each of us, together, for some mysterious magnificence of life took shape and became real, so that finally, after four months of it, we were sorrowful together and could not speak, and it seemed to me that I knew Myra more fully than any man had ever before known a woman. At first I was garrulous, talking my head off about what I had done and thought and dreamed, and what I hoped to do, and every now and then Myra herself would speak and laugh this same way, but all these things dwindled away

beneath the growth of this longing in us, and finally we could not speak, and did not even *want* to speak, did not even *need* to.

I would see Myra and she would see me, and that would be the end of it. I mean, it was enough for each of us to know that the other lived, and it was somehow such a vast significance to us that even after all these years I still have to laugh, remembering her and myself as we were then.

I suppose the whole thing had something to do with the fact that we almost always saw one another toward evening, toward the end of day, when quietness would come over the earth, and light would change sadly to darkness, and the sky, over the ocean, just before the disappearance of the sun, would cry out with the passionate color of the ending of warmth, cry against night, the coming of cold, the coming of death and secrecy, and these things probably combined to make us sullen with the desire to possess, in possessing one another, the whole universe, all of life, all of grace and beauty, once, and somehow forever.

And we were afraid.

One evening in September, after we had known one another seven months, we took a street car, on Geary Street, and rode to the ocean. I do not know why we did this, unless it was that we needed desperately to get to some place that might seem far away from the earth, far from the city, but I am sure we did not stop to wonder why. I remember that we stood together on the front platform of the car, looking toward the sea, and now and then at one another, saying nothing, each of us being a little more frightened than ever before.

The Geary line car rises upward to the top of a hill, and from this point; while the car rolls downward, one can see the ocean, and toward the end of day when this strange sadness comes over the earth, and when the sun is low upon

the far endlessness of water, this picture is both beautiful and frightening, seeming to be a moment of another place, and causing one to feel that one is of this other place, and has been always. And being on a street car, with this sense of belonging to a place without beginning or end, is like being, incredibly, of two places, two earths, two worlds, the world of the street car, and this other world, the one of essences, of those deep and everlasting feelings in the heart of man which persist, almost pathetically, in spite of all the accumulation of mortal places and ideas: huts, villages, cities, governments, civilizations. And one feels a homesickness for this other place which is all the more tragic in that one knows such a place does not exist; at least not this time.

I walked with Myra to the shore of the sea, and walking by the moving water all things were suddenly perfect, as the moment was perfect, but behind this perfection were night and death, change and decay and desolation, upon the earth, and within the heart of life, and we knew there could be no permanence of glory, no timelessness of love and adoration of life, and because we knew this, we were sad with the tragic sadness of the moment. All things would pass with the passing of this moment: Myra, and myself, and all life.

In the wind, she removed her coat, revealing her arms, so miraculously perfect and beautiful that I laughed and wept at once, and the wind loosened her hair, and suddenly within myself, apart from emotion and language, I began to weep and swear, knowing it would be death, inevitably, and if it was to be death anyway, why could not I, with Myra, die with the dying of the day? Why could not we be of its perfection forever? Why should we have to wait for the other death, our bodies rotten and old and ugly? Dying in the other place?

One moment, when she looked into my eyes, and saw there this wish, Myra sobbed, and then laughed, turning from me and running to the water. Only my heart had language with which to reply to this sob, and it cried out: Myra, let us be dead now, let us be dead together, now and forever. But my body ran to her, as the body of a boy running to the body of a girl, and the lips of my body touched the lips of the body of Myra, and the arms of it embraced her, and then it was the same again: as with all others. We wanted life. Here, in this place.

Day sank beneath night, and darkness increased. We stood by the water, shivering, and not knowing which way to go. Slowly, we returned to the street, to life on earth, to the city, and we entered one of the beach restaurants. Sitting across the table from Myra, seeing in her eyes the death of this longing, and in it the death of my own longing, I knew that it was ended, and that in a year or two Myra would marry some young fellow with a good job and be his wife, like any other girl, and swallowing hot coffee, I knew also that the first thing in the morning I would buy myself a new suit and a new hat, and forget the whole thing, and stay alive as long as possible, puny and weak and mortal.



## IT'S AN OLD STORY<sup>1</sup>

BY STEVE GOODMAN

*Mrs. Heller waited for Helen to say as she had so often said before, "That's all right, George. I can go home alone. You stay here with your mother."*

*But this time she did not say it and for a minute the two women looked at each other silently, with a cold hatred.*

IT was only a short walk from George's house to the subway station, but he was late—twenty minutes late—and he felt sure that Helen would be there, just outside the kiosk, waiting for him. If she had arrived there punctually, then by this time she would be tapping her foot a little impatiently while she stood there, staring at the magazine covers on the newsstand. But if she had been a little late herself, or if she had only just come, she would be staring down the length of the street, smiling a little to herself, and eager to see George before he saw her.

He turned the last corner and he could see the subway station—and Helen smiling. He smiled happily back at her and quickened his pace a little.

"Hello, darling," he said, and his arms slid around her possessively. "You're not waiting long, are you?"

She was almost as tall as he was. The tip of her nose coincided conveniently with the level of his lips.

<sup>1</sup> From *Story Magazine*, February, 1938. Reprinted by permission of *Story Magazine*.

"Not too long," she said, "but I could have had another date—if I'd winked back. Fellow who passed by. Awfully nice *looking* boy. Sweet face and—"

"Sounds sort of like me."

"—and I was really tempted. Then I thought, 'Well, I've got a date with George'—or have I? We *have* a date, haven't we?"

"Honey, I love you. Yes, we have a date. Mamma's preparing dinner for the three of us at home."

"Oh—"

"That's why I was a little late. Mamma remembered something she forgot to get at the grocery and I had to go for it."

"All right, George," she said in a voice that was slightly resigned. It was a "why-argue, we've-been-through-this-so-often-before" voice. She linked her arm in his and the two of them turned down the street toward George's house.

They walked slowly, as though they weren't in a hurry to get anywhere, but the house wasn't very far and they were soon there. It was an old-fashioned, four-story apartment house with iron fire escapes attached to the front façade.

The apartment where George lived with his mother was on the third floor. At the third landing George and Helen stopped. They were very close to each other, and he put his arms around her and kissed her.

"It's funny—I never want anyone but you doing this to me, George. I'm afraid I love you."

"Why be afraid, silly? Of course you love me. It's an old story."

There were two apartments on each landing. The door of one opened almost silently, and George's mother stood there, shaking her finger waggishly.

"Georgie!" she said. "Shame on you. Supposing somebody should pass by and see you. That will be nice, hah?"

She spoke slowly and articulated each word deliberately, as people do when they speak a language they have learned late in life. She was a short, slight woman in her late middle age. Despite that, the dress she wore was youthful in its style and light in color. Her hands were well kept, with colorless but polished nails. Her silver-white hair was immaculately combed. There was a certain similarity between her features and George's, except that the lines and contours of her face were sharp and decided where George's were still weak and indefinite.

"Hello, Mrs. Heller," Helen said.

"Hello. Come in already. The supper is cold on the table. Georgie tells me 'I'm just going by the station to meet Helen and we'll come right back.' So here I'm waiting already fifteen minutes. Come in."

"All right, ma, we're here now, and hungry for that goulash you've made."

George took Helen's hat and coat and laid them on the bed in his room.

"I want to wash up, George. I'll just be a minute. You sit at the table and I'll be right with you."

Mrs. Heller walked up to her. "Here's for you a towel." She held it out to Helen at arm's length. It was a clean towel, freshly laundered and snow-white, but something in Mrs. Heller's gesture implied that it was unclean—or would be, soon.

"Don't forget," she told Helen before she walked away, "the supper is already cold on the table."

They sat around the table after the meal, the soiled dishes still spread untidily before them. Mrs. Heller was at the head of the table, George was at the foot and Helen sat between them.

"Well," Mrs. Heller said, "what are we going to do tonight, hah? What's on the program for tonight, Georgie?"

she smiled at George. He looked quickly at Helen who was staring into the plate on the table before her.

"Helen and I were going down town," George said. "We should be leaving soon."

"Again down town?" Mrs. Heller asked incredulously. "The third time already this week it's down town."

"Well, gee, ma, one of those times I was working at the office. You know that. The only night I was really out was Monday, and that's almost a week ago."

Helen cleared her throat. "Maybe—" she began tentatively.

Mrs. Heller turned to her abruptly.

"Maybe—what?" she asked, harshly.

"Maybe George and I could take you to the movies and then call for you again after the show. I—I don't feel quite like a movie tonight." She knew what it would be like—the close, oppressive atmosphere of the small, neighborhood movie house. George, holding one of her hands and one of his mother's, explaining phrases of dialogue and intricacies of situation to Mrs. Heller until the people around them said, "Shh—" and Mrs. Heller glared back at them and said, "Shah—bah!"

Mrs. Heller was still looking at Helen intently, unpleasantly.

"That's very nice," she said. "I should go all by myself to the movies! Maybe you think I'm a young spring chicken. I could come—go—do—anything— You don't know how it feels to be an old lady. Wait, wait, you'll find out." There was a quaver in her voice and she dabbed at her eyes with her napkin.

"Oh, ma," George said, "you're not an old lady." He left his chair and walked around the table and stood behind his mother, his hands around her shoulders.

Mrs. Heller patted his hands and continued speaking.



"She doesn't know, Georgie, that whenever you're out half the night—with her—I don't close my eyes until you come home. How should a young girl know those things—from where?"

She patted George's hands again and disengaged them from around her neck. She rose from the table, smiling sadly, like a martyr. "All right," she said, "so we won't go to the movies. We'll spend the evening home and I'll save for you some money. We'll wash instead the dishes, Georgie and me."

Helen smiled at the two of them. "Dishes aren't a man's job," she said. She left her seat and began to collect the empty plates. "I'll help you," she told Mrs. Heller.

Mrs. Heller was at her side in a minute. She placed her hand heavily on Helen's shoulder. "Please!" she said loudly, and then in a quieter tone, "by me, in my house, you're a guest. A guest shouldn't touch a dish. If George won't help me then I could wash the few plates myself, thank God! So old I'm not."

"But I'm not a guest any longer, Mrs. Heller. I'm more than a guest by this time, don't you think?"

"Listen," Mrs. Heller told her slowly, "by me, in my house, you'll always be a guest." She walked away from Helen, away from the table and into the kitchen.

George went to Helen and put his arms around her. "Don't feel hurt, darling. She doesn't mean anything when she says things like that." He put one hand beneath her chin and, tilting her face up, kissed her.

"But why, George? Why does she do those things—and say those things to me? She doesn't do them innocently, darling. She gets a certain pleasure every time I let her see she's hurt me. She's mean, really mean. I wouldn't let anyone else talk to me as she does. It's only for your sake that I let even her do it."

Mrs. Heller appeared in the doorway between the kitchen and the dining room. "Georgie," she said, "if you'll bring in the dishes we'll wash them—one—two—three. Then we could all sit in the parlor."

"Go ahead, George," Helen told him quietly, stepping out of his embrace, all the while under the close scrutiny of Mrs. Heller, "do your dishes—then we can sit in the parlor. All three of us."

"Helen, please," he said.

"Oh, go *ahead*. I know you can't help yourself. Only, don't be too long."

It was later in the evening, and they were in the living room, George and Helen seated on a divan and Mrs. Heller in an easy chair a few feet away. She had a sewing basket on her lap and was intermittently engaged in mending.

"He walks through his socks like through tissue paper," she said, smiling fondly at George. She looked at the cigarette Helen had just lit and she coughed slightly.

Mrs. Heller, with a sigh of relief, laid aside her mending as the telephone rang in the next room and George walked in there to answer it. It was his married brother, Murray, and they carried on conversation for several minutes.

"How's Sylvia?" George asked . . . "and the baby? . . . That's good. Helen's here and we've just finished dinner. . . . No. I don't think mom is planning to do anything. . . . Well, wait a minute and I'll ask her. Mom!"

"Who is it, Georgie, Morris?"

"Yes, he wants to know if you'd like to go out for a drive. He'll stop by here and call for you."

"I should go riding with Morris?" Mrs. Heller asked the world in general. "He rides like a crazy one. I'm always afraid with him I should break my neck." With a shrug of her shoulders she concluded, "I'll rather stay home."

Helen's cigarette caught her attention and she coughed again, more vigorously, her handkerchief held ostentatiously at her mouth.

"Oh my *God*," thought Helen, but she snuffed out the cigarette.

George returned to the living room and resumed his seat.

"He feels all right?" his mother asked.

"Yes, he's all right," he told her. "So is Sylvia, and the baby."

"He works so hard, poor boy, I'm glad he's feeling good."

"I think I'd like to go home," Helen said.

"But it's so early, honey. Don't go yet, please."

A little defiantly, Helen lit another cigarette. "I know it is," she said, "but I have a bad headache. I'd really like very much to go. Oh, I've *got* to go."

Mrs. Heller looked at her in great concern. "Maybe you should see a good doctor," she said. "Maybe you smoke too much. You're getting those headaches often, hah?"

"No, not very often," Helen said shortly. "I'm perfectly healthy. I've got this headache only because it's so close and depressing here. Why don't you open some windows, and use more lights? Where's my coat, George?"

"It's in my room. Come in, I'll help you with it."

Mrs. Heller followed them to George's room and stood in the doorway while he helped Helen into her coat and then put on his own.

"You're going out too, Georgie?"

"Well, I have to take Helen home," he said, "I'm not going to let her go alone."

Mrs. Heller turned and stared at Helen waiting for her to say, as she had often said before, "That's all right, George. It's such a short walk to the station, I can make it alone. You stay here with your mother."

This time, however, Helen remained silent, and for a

minute the two women looked at each other, silently, with a cold hatred. Finally the older woman spoke.

"He's going to take you all the way home, or just to the station?"

"I don't know. George will have to make that decision himself."

"Well, ma, Helen isn't feeling well. I don't think she should have to ride home alone."

"And me?" Mrs. Heller asked sarcastically. "I'm the picture of health? The blood is flowing in my cheeks? But all right," she said sadly as she turned and walked back to the other room, "go do what you want."

"Good-bye," Helen said. She hurried through the apartment door without even waiting for George. It was ten o'clock, and the lights in the halls were dimmed. She had to go more slowly down the darkened stairs, and George overtook her at the lower landing. He overtook her, and there in the darkness they were each tense in the other's arms. He put his hands up to her cheeks and felt the warm tears flowing quickly—then slowly—and more slowly.



## FRUIT TRAMP<sup>1</sup>

BY DAN MAINWARING

*"He's always talking about a living wage,"  
Jake said.*

*"Then he's a Red. They always talk like that,"  
the farmer said.*

*"Let's all go over and talk to him," Hal said,  
"Maybe if we put it up to him that we got to  
live too he'll be reasonable."*

IN July the fruit tramps came to Clovis. They put up tents in the eucalyptus grove along the track, and at night you could see them sitting around their little fires.

The Elbertas would be ripening when they drove in battered Fords and Chevrolets along the highway to the hills. Within a week a community would spring up in the grove to stay there until the last peach was in the sweat box and the last raisin had been hauled to the packing shed.

Every year or so, there was talk of turning the grove into a park, but no one did anything about it. Once in a while the townspeople sent Old Tim, the constable, over to make the fruit tramps clean up around the tents that looked like dirty bits of fungus growing against the tree trunks. Tim would hang about for a while talking to the children and telling the women to hang their washing so it could not be seen from the road.

<sup>1</sup> From *Today's Literature*, edited by Dudley Chadwick Gordon, Vernon Rupert King, and William Whittingham Lyman (New York, American Book Co., 1935). Reprinted by courtesy of the author.



"Them underdrawers now," he would say, "they don't look so good from John Good's store. Better get 'em out of sight." He would grumble a little and then go back to his chair on the porch of his office and sit there for the rest of the day, half asleep, his big hat pulled down over his eyes to keep out the glare of the sun, sucking at his dead pipe and shouting to the people he knew.

Farmers who needed help went to the grove and hired a family, children and all, paying the men so much a day to pick the fruit and the women and children a few cents a box for cutting peaches. Usually one of the little girls stayed at the camp to cook supper and have it ready when the family came back at dusk, and during the day in the fruit season you could see them bending over the pots or washing clothes or making miniature cities out of syrup cans and spools when they had nothing else to do.

For a while, during the War and right after it, fruit prices were good and the tramps made plenty of money. Six dollars a day the men were paid, and the women received as high as four or five cents a box. It wasn't bad being a fruit tramp then.

But people in the cities stopped eating so many peaches and raisins. Prices went way down. The mortgage companies came, took the Lincolns and Cadillacs out of the barns, loaded the furniture the farmers had bought in good times into moving vans and drove away, and the banks foreclosed on the land and took over some of the farms.

Still the fruit tramps came every year when the Elbertas were turning yellow in the shiny leaves. Not so many came, but the grove was pretty well filled with men and women and children who drove along the highway leading to the hills and pitched their camps in the shade of the trees planted there by a man named Cole fifty years before.

When times were bad it wasn't easy to make a living

picking peaches and grapes, cutting the peaches in half, laying them in orderly rows on the trays. It was hard, unpleasant work. Out in the orchards the heat waves rose, and when you knelt on the earth to pick the fruit up the sand burned through your overalls. The cutting sheds offered little shelter from the sun, and the fuzz from the peaches crept up the women's arms and down the necks of their dresses. They stood all day on the packed earth of the shed, picking the fruit up with their nimble fingers, jabbing the knife point into the soft flesh and, with a twist, halving the fruit.

The filled trays piled up, and before the stack was thirty high the shorter women and the little girls had to stand on boxes so they could reach. Usually the farmer's youngest son rustled for the cutters, taking the empty boxes away, putting full ones in front of the women, pushing the cars loaded with trays of fruit into the sulphur houses which stood back of the sheds.

When the wind blew from the sulphur houses, the sheds were filled with yellow, choking smoke. In the early morning everyone would be cheerful and the girls would giggle when the rustler pushed against them and the women would shout at the men who drove up in the vineyard trucks. In the afternoon, though, everyone would be tired and cross and the rustler would growl at the women to hurry. By that time their skins would be covered with peach fuzz and would itch and burn and where they scratched themselves with sticky fingers a rash would break out.

Our family was so big that we didn't have to hire any fruit tramps, but did the work ourselves. Sometimes when the crop was poor we went over to the Jap's and helped him out. Other farmers thought father was lucky because he had so many children to do his work. He used to say, "Well, let them try to feed you for a while and then they'll know who's lucky." Once he offered to trade ranches with John

Cadwallader, who had one son. "I'll take your boy. You take my mess of kids," father said. "I'll hire me some tramps to do the work. They feed themselves."

When things got bad we didn't feel it like the other farmers, or maybe it was because we hadn't been used to anything much. It always took all the money father made to feed us, so we never bought a car or new furniture, and father said he couldn't afford a mortgage.

The summer when prices were lowest didn't affect us as it did the others. We were in a position to sit back and watch when the trouble with the fruit tramps started.

It was hot that year. There had been little rain and when June came the mountain tops were bare of snow. From the valley you could see little patches near the ragged crest of the ridge, like bits of paper scattered through the trees. The canals were dry and the river was so low we didn't dare go swimming because they said we'd get typhoid fever. All night the engines throbbed, pulling the water from the deep cool sands, spilling it into the ditches, and sometimes late at night we would go over to the Jap's and lie naked in the little pool near the pump, letting the cold water cover us. We had no pumping plant of our own, so the Jap gave us water when we needed it because we always helped him get his crop in when ours was poor.

The fruit tramps came again that year, more of them than ever. There were new faces in the grove. People who didn't know what a raisin was put up tents and looked round for work. They came from farther away, from Los Angeles and San Francisco where things were bad too and work was hard to find. It was a cheap way to spend a summer, camped in a grove of eucalyptus trees rent free, and I suppose they figured the fruit had to be picked so the farmers would pay them to do it.



Around the first of July, when the Elbertas were coloring up enough so they could be shipped green, Aubrey Bell stopped by the bridge to talk to father.

"What you paying this year?" father asked.

"Don't know. Last year we paid two bits an hour. We can't now."

"You'll make more leaving the peaches on the trees," father said.

"What you going to do?"

"We'll get along," father said, pointing to where we were sitting on the porch with mother stringing capri figs on wires. "I got all the help I need. All I got to do is feed 'em."

"You're lucky," Aubrey said.

"Try it some time," father said. "I'll trade you the whole lot for a pair of mules."

"You won't trade me for a mule," my sister Rose said.

"I couldn't get a mule for you," father said. "Who'd want you?"

"If we pay fifteen cents an hour, we can make a go of it," Aubrey said. "I figure I can make a hundred and fifty bucks off my Elbertas if I pay that."

"They won't take it," father said.

"Let 'em starve then." Aubrey started his Ford and went away along the dusty, rutted road.

We heard no more about it for a week or so. Then father went in to town for some flour and rice and beans and talked for a long time to John Good. At dinner that night he told mother all the farmers had got together and decided to pay fifteen cents an hour to the pickers and a cent a box to the cutters.

"You'd make ten cents a day," he told Rose.

"Not that much," my brother Joe said. "Maybe eight."

Rose threw a book at him and he grabbed her and they rolled over on the porch, almost upsetting the coal oil lamp.

"Stop it. I'll lick you both," mother said.

"That's an awful little bit," father said. "I'd hate to work for that."

"I work for less," mother said.

"Want to quit?"

"Sure," mother said, but when we saw her face we knew she didn't mean it.

"I'm sorry for the farmers," father said. "But it's their own fault. They bought a lot of junk when things were good. They put in electric lights and drove around in cars they couldn't pay for. I guess they'll always be like that, though. I'm sorry for those tramps too. That isn't such a nice way to live, camped in the center of town on the dirty ground with everybody looking at your washing hanging on the line, knowing how many holes there are in your undershirt, seeing you eat your dinner every night."

"They don't mind," mother said.

"Some of them do. The new ones. There's people camped in the grove who never was outside a city before. They're going to make trouble, John says. Says some of them are Reds."

"What's Reds?" my sister Nell asked.

"Russians," father said.

"But why Reds? Why not blues or pinks or yellows?" Nell asked.

"Call them anything you like," father said. "I think it's a lot of talk anyway. They don't look bad to me. Only kind of pitiful and white-faced like they didn't have enough to eat. I wanted to take the grub over and give it to them."

"That would have been fine," mother said. "Then you could have felt sorry for us."

I took the wagon in to Clovis next day to have the blacksmith set the tires. I hung round the shop for a while, helping him with the forge, watching him as he spun the steel

hoop on the anvil and hit it with his hammer while the sparks flew all around him and dropped in the inch-thick coat of coal dust on the floor. Then I went out into the sun and walked down the main street to John Good's store.

A lot of farmers were hanging about outside, talking. After I listened for a time I found they were having trouble getting pickers. Some of the fruit tramps were willing to work for anything and they had gone out to the farms; but the rest said they'd rather starve than pick peaches for fifteen cents an hour.

Jake Cole came back from the grove pretty soon. "There's a big guy over there who thinks he's running things," Jake said. "He's getting the tramps all together and telling them not to work. He says they should get a living wage."

"He's a damn Communist," Hal Bradley said.

There was a little hunchback in the crowd named Emory Whitfield who lived about a mile from our place. He got pretty excited and began waving his arms and swearing. "Those damn Rooshians," he said, "they ought to go back to their own country. Who in hell do they think they are anyway?" When he talked he kept bobbing his head, and the hump on his back looked like something loose stuck inside of his blue work shirt. He hadn't shaved for a long time and around his lips his red whiskers were brown from tobacco juice.

"He don't look like a Rooshian to me," Jake said. "He's as white as I am."

"You ain't so white," Hal said. "Maybe you would be if you went in the ditch once in a while."

"You can't tell about Communists by their looks," a farmer I didn't know said. "It's the way they talk you can tell by."

"Well, he's always talking about a living wage," Jake said.

"Then he's a Red. They always talk like that," the farmer said.

"Let's all go over and talk to him," Hal said. "Maybe if we put it up to him that we got to live too he'll be reasonable."

"Maybe he won't. I already told him," Jake said.

"It won't do no hurt," Hal said.

"Let's run him out of town," the hunchback said. "We been treating them too good, giving them a place to live and all. I been saying for years we shouldn't let them live in the grove. Look how dirty they keep it."

When I thought about the hunchback's ranch and how dirty the house and yard and outhouses were, I snickered, but no one paid any attention to me. They went across the road and I followed, the hot dust burning my bare feet. I ran across quickly and stood in the shade as close as I could get to the tent where the big man they called a Communist lived. He was sitting on a lug box, cutting a chain out of a piece of white pine with a thin-bladed knife, but when he saw all the farmers he stood up. He was a big man with broad shoulders, bigger even than father, and through the faded blue shirt you could see the muscles on his arms like big lumps. His hair was as pale colored as straw and around his neck and ears it was ragged. Probably his wife cut his hair as mother did mine, with a pair of dull scissors.

Some of the other tramps left their tents and came over and stood behind the big man, and you could see he was different from them because his clothes were clean and his face and hands were clean and when he talked he spoke good English.

"Well, how about it?" Hal asked. "Jake here says you boys won't work for less than two bits an hour."

"That's right," the big man said.

"We can't pay that," Hal said and you could see he was

trying to be nice about it. "We don't make much off our farms. Hardly enough to pay the taxes. We can just get by if we pay fifteen cents."

"Would you work for that?" the big man asked.

"If I was hungry I would," Hal said.

"We aren't that hungry," the big man said.

Emory Whitfield pushed up to the front and waved his fist. "You will be before we get through with you," he said.

"Shut up, Emory," Hal said. "Let me do the talking. It won't do no good to get tough about it."

The big man smiled at Hal. "You seem reasonable. Now put yourself in our place. We have to eat too. I feel that it would be better not to work at all than to slave in this hot sun for nothing."

"What do you mean nothing?" the hunchback yelled. "Ain't we willing to pay you fifteen cents an hour and your women folks a cent a box for cutting?"

"You're too kind." The big man wasn't smiling any more. "We won't do it, so there's no use talking about it."

"By God! let's run 'em out of town," the hunchback said.

Hal grabbed Whitfield's arm and told him to shut up. "You think it over," he said to the big man. "We can't pay no more and it ain't because we don't want to. We got to live too."

"I know," the big man said.

The crowd went back to the store. I was going to hang around but then I looked at the clock and remembered about the wagon. I hurried back to the blacksmith shop, hitched up the team, and drove on home. When I told father about the trouble at the grove he said I'd better keep away from the fruit tramps or I'd get hurt.

They didn't give in and the farmers didn't give in, so the Elbertas ripened on the trees, fell on the clods and rotted in the sun. Before the packing sheds, the empty refrigerator

cars stood waiting and the crews of women who were to pack the peaches for shipment to the east were laid off. Four families got tired of going hungry and went to work on the Miller ranch. Because the other tramps were mad at them for not holding out, they moved their tents into the willows along Dry Creek.

There had been a couple of fist fights in Clovis already, and some of the tramps were threatening to dump out the fruit that lay on trays in Miller's drying yard down by the river, or so the farmers said. A barn half filled with hay on the Thompson ranch caught fire and burned, and people round us blamed the tramps, though father was sure the Thompson boys had been smoking in the hay loft.

Some of the farmers wanted trouble but the rest were pretty upset about the whole business, feeling sorry for themselves and for the strikers. It wasn't nice to go by the grove and see the women and kids sitting around looking like they needed something to eat. Four or five women in the town got groceries together and took them over to the camp. The big man thanked them and said they didn't need charity, but when he wasn't looking some of the others took the things the women brought. That's what we heard from the farmers who stopped in at dusk to sit on the tank house steps and talk to father.

I saw the big man again two weeks after the strike started. Father and I were spreading trays in the drying yard on the sand, which was burning hot even though the sun was gone. After a while we knocked off to get a drink, and as I brought the cool water from the well I saw him coming through the orchard, carrying a shotgun.

Joe, standing on the porch with his face pressed against the screen, told father to look and pointed at the big man. "He's going to dump our peaches out," Joe whispered.

"Hush," father said and when the man came across the yard, offered him the dipper filled with water.

The big man leaned his gun against the stairs and took the dipper.

"Any luck?" father asked.

The big man shook his head. "Thought I might get a rabbit. Didn't see a single one."

"We don't eat rabbits round here this time of year," father said. "They have sores on their necks."

"They'd be better than nothing, at that."

Father held out his hand. "My name's Bigelow."

"Mine's Martin."

"You don't live around here."

"No. I'm camped in the grove. One of the strikers."

Joe had come out of the porch and stood near the pump. "Are you a Red?" he asked.

"Joe." Father frowned at him.

"Do I look like it, son?" the big man asked and when father started to apologize he laughed. "I know what they've been saying about us. It doesn't hurt my feelings."

Father rolled a cigarette and gave the papers and tobacco to Martin. "Sit on the steps a while."

Martin sat down, poured the tobacco in a paper, made a cigarette.

"I'm neutral in this business," father said. "I got so many kids I don't hire any help. Couldn't if I wanted to."

"Do you blame us for holding out?"

"They can't pay more."

"Perhaps not. But it seems wrong to me to work for such a little bit. They're taking advantage of our poverty."

"You've never been a farmer, have you?"

"No. This is my first fling at it. Until now I worked in cities."

"You don't see things the way we do then," father said.

"I guess not. I only know I won't work for fifteen cents an hour, and as long as I can control the others, they won't either."

Father didn't say anything more until mother told us supper was ready. "You might as well have supper with us, Mr. Martin."

Martin stood up. "No, thanks. They're waiting for me in the grove."

Mother came through the back door. "Please stay. I'll fix some things for you to take home."

"Thanks," the big man said. "I couldn't do that." And he went away from us, down the lane to the bridge toward town. I watched him until his big form was out of sight.

Saturday morning, three weeks after the strike started, Jake Cole came over to borrow our hay wagon. One of his eyes was black and there was a bruise on his jaw.

"Celebrating?" father asked.

Jake shook his head. He was pretty serious. "We had a big fight in town last night. A bunch of us, maybe ten, went over to see if we couldn't knock some sense into those guys."

"Didn't have much luck, did you?"

"We will," Jake said.

"Let them alone," father told him. "You'll just get into trouble and your fruit will rot anyway."

"We're going to fix them tonight," Jake said. "Last night we told 'em. I told that big guy, I said, 'By God, either you pick our fruit for what we'll pay you or get out of our town.'"

Father looked up from hooking the traces. "That sort of stuff gets you nowhere, Jake."

"You talk like you was stringing along with them." Jake sounded angry.



"Be yourself, Jake. I don't want to see you get into trouble."

"All the boys are going to be there. You better show up too."

"Not me."

"You getting yellow? Want us to think that?"

"I don't care what you think," father said. "Go haul your hay and cool off. If I didn't know you so well I'd kick your pants for you."

Jake drove off in our wagon. Father saw me standing around watching and told me to get the hell out in the fields and go to work. I took a shovel and ran out to where Joe was cutting a ditch across the lower end of the patch of Lovells. It would be three weeks yet before they were ripe, and father thought one last soaking would make them a lot bigger.

After supper father hitched the team to the buckboard and climbed to the seat. Joe and I asked if we could go along, but he said no, he had some business to attend to, and the best place for us was home. After he was out of sight we told mother we were going over to the Jap's to swim and lit out on the short cut to Clovis.

We ran for a way, then Joe got out of breath and we lay down in a row of vines and looked at the moon coming up over the hills. It was pretty dark because there was only a piece of moon like a sickle you have just shined up on the grindstone hanging right back of Kings River canyon. The wind was soft and cool to our faces and it moved the arms of the grape vines a little, making a soft whispering sound as though it was trying to tell us something. Joe tugged at my arm. "Let's hurry," he said.

We walked fast along the creek, cut through the Malstar place to the road and then followed the railroad tracks to town.

"Better not let father see us," Joe said. "He'd sure be mad."

There was a packing shed right at the end of the grove, and we climbed on the platform and sat on some lug boxes, waiting. It was pretty quiet at first. Away off a train whistled twice and you could hear the engine puffing, the night was so still. In the grove people were talking and through the trees you could see them sitting around their fires.

A lot of automobiles were parked in front of the stores that faced the main street and up at the end of the line was our buckboard, the only one there, but father wasn't in it.

Someone was talking in a loud voice over by John Good's store. We moved our boxes back so no one could see us, and waited, and then a lot of men were crossing the road to the grove. It was too dark to see who they were, but I knew they were farmers and that father was probably with them. The crowd stopped not far from the tracks, right in front of us. Out of the trees came a bunch of men and the big man was in front.

I looked all through the crowd but couldn't see father, and that made me feel better. Emory Whitfield stepped forward and began to yell, "Get the hell out of our town or we'll run you out, you damned Bolsheviks."

"We're harming no one," the big man said. "We have a right to do as we please."

"Not in this town, you don't." Jake Cole moved toward the tramps beside the hunchback. "Pack up your trash and get out of here."

"We stay here," the big man said.

The farmers moved closer. A couple of them had shotguns under their arms. Others were carrying pitchforks and lumber. The tramps edged backward, all but the big man.

"They won't hurt us," he said.

"Not if you clear out we won't," Jake said.

"Don't let them frighten you," the big man told the other tramps.

The hunchback started to yell again, running back and forth between the crowds of men, yelling at the farmers to run the tramps out of town.

Someone was coming fast across the road. It was father, and Old Tim, the constable, trying to keep up with him.

"Let Tim handle this," father told the farmers. "I routed him out and brought him over here. It's his job. You boys go on home before you get into trouble."

"You keep your nose out of this," Jake said.

The hunchback was jumping up and down in front of father. "You got a mess of kids to do your work," he said. "You don't have to worry none. Come butting in here when it's none of your damn business."

"Send 'em all home, Tim," father said. "Tomorrow you can clear the camp out. Old man Galt will give you an order. But hell, they can't move tonight."

Jake stepped up close to father. "I said to keep your nose out of this." Jake was pretty big but my father was a head taller and a lot broader. He grabbed Jake's shoulder, spun him around, and planted his foot in the seat of Jake's pants. "You got that coming to you, Jake," he said. "Run along home."

One of the farmers raised a club.

"Look out, father," I yelled. It didn't do any good. The two by four smashed against his head, he put up his hands, moved around like he was dizzy, and then fell down. Joe jumped off the platform screaming "Father, father" at the top of his voice, and I jumped after him.

And as we ran toward the crowd the big man jumped forward, grabbed Jake, and hurled him at the farmers. I caught Joe and held him because we couldn't do any good. He kept screaming, clawing at my hands to get loose, and over his

head I saw the men fighting, the big man hitting at the people I knew with his fists, all alone because the other tramps had run into the grove.

"Red. Bolshevik. Rooshian," the hunchback was yelling. "Kill the bastard Rooshian."

Hal Bradley grappled with the big man, but he was thin, and the tramp picked him up and tossed him out of the way as though he were a little boy. Then the big man stood there, telling them to come on, telling them to drive him out of town.

A gun went off and a red flame pointed at the big man. He put his hands over his belly and started moving backward, very slowly, toward the grove, but he didn't get there. Maybe he tripped over something, I don't know; but he fell down and a woman came running out to him, took his head in her arms, and started to cry.

All of a sudden the farmers were gone and father was sitting up, holding his head and swearing. We went over to him, and Joe held on to him tight and kept asking, "You all right, father, you all right?"

Old Tim helped father up and we all went over and looked at the big man. He wasn't groaning, just lying stretched out with his head in the woman's lap, and she was crying.

In the grove the fruit tramps were tearing the tents down and packing their stuff in automobiles, and inside of an hour there was only one tent left in the grove. That belonged to the big man and he didn't need it any more.



## THE NEW YORK VISIT <sup>1</sup>

BY LEANE ZUGSMITH

*If he had let her go alone as he had promised she would have overlooked all the other betrayals. But he had come along. . . . After all she had a new dress and a camel's-hair coat and a date with Artie Wayne tonight in New York.*

FORGIVENESS was not in her peaked child's face. Scrape the rouge from her cheeks, the crusted lip salve from her mouth, the hard clots of black from her lashes, and you would find no sign of her relenting. Throughout the train ride she had preserved a distance between her father and herself on the plush seat. If he moved toward her, never realizing that she was not with him, that she was a young woman traveling all by herself to New York, she snatched closer to her the folds of her purple silk dress that swept down to the tips of her high-heeled sandals. She liked to touch the dress; it was new; the girls had told her she looked every bit of eighteen in it. With her dangling earrings, the fraternity pins—borrowed from the girls—bold on the front of her dress, the hat perched on the back of her head like an oversize button, the imitation-camel's-hair coat ready to be belted around her, she was certain that she looked nineteen, even twenty.

But that had nothing to do with Father, whom she would

<sup>1</sup> Leane Zugsmith, *Home Is Where You Hang Your Childhood* (New York, Random House, 1937). Reprinted by permission of the author.

never forgive, or Mother, whom she would never forgive for other reasons. All her life, it seemed, he had been preventing her from going to New York. At fourteen, when she had wanted to go, pretending she wanted to see her mother, but actually planning to get a job on the stage, he had said she was too young to travel alone from Milwaukee. At fifteen, when Roberta Sloane had invited her for a visit in New York, he had said the train fare was more than he could afford. She was sixteen now, and she was on her way. The fraternity pins quivered with her quickened breathing. She pressed her nose against the window-pane, and then, as though he had seen her and laughed at her childishness, she turned defiantly toward her father.

If he had let her go alone, as he had promised, she would have overlooked all the other betrayals. But practically at the last minute, pretending he had business in New York, he had come along. She knew why. She knew. He had not been able to produce his old excuses, now that they were living in Wilmington, now that she was grown-up. And when her mother's letters all sounded the same refrain: "Tell him he has no right to keep you from me, Doris. Tell him I said I have a right to see my child," she had shown him the letters, without comment. She was accustomed to bearing messages. Before Father and Mother had split up, before she was eleven, she had conveyed messages from one to the other when they were not speaking. *Tell your mother that if she charges even a hairpin, I'll advertise I'm not responsible for any debts but my own. . . . Tell him I won't stir from my room until he leaves the house. . . . Tell him. Tell her. Yes, and tell the music teacher we can't pay until the first of the year. Tell the butcher, next month. . . .* She should have worn a messenger's uniform, she thought, and then covertly she put her hand behind her to stroke the camel's-hair coat. After all, she had a new dress and a camel's-hair

coat, and she had a date with Artie Wayne tonight in New York.

Obliquely, she looked at her father. He was dozing, his head uncomfortably propped against the back of the seat. She wanted very much to wake him, to ask him how soon they would get there. But it would be a sign of softness. She would not be friendly until they were actually in the hotel. At the thought of the hotel, the fraternity pins quivered again with her rapid breathing. That much she had wrested from him. If he insisted on going along (afraid to have her meet her mother without him, *she* knew!), he must let her spend the first night at a hotel. She wanted Artie Wayne to call for her at a hotel. Father had told her that her mother lived in Greenwich Village, in a furnished room, calling herself by her maiden name, no place for a young girl like you. She had not even let Artie know she was coming until she had made Father promise that she wouldn't have to be called for in a place like that. Imagine having to introduce your mother as if she weren't married, in a furnished room, which your father had said was no place for you.

He had let her choose the hotel herself, the Astor. It was the only New York hotel she could think of, and she had flipped it at him so promptly that he hadn't been able to say a word about expense, the way he always did when he went with her to buy clothes and always pretended to admire the cheapest thing in the place. But the purple silk was all right, she thought, and stroked it with the hand adorned by her heavy high-school ring and the silver one with the aquamarine.

Presently her ears felt strange, it was dark without, and the passengers were beginning to collect their belongings. She tugged at her father's coat sleeve.

"Father, I'm positive we're getting in," she said with excitement.

By the time she had reshaped her mouth with the lip salve and drawn the belt of her coat as tightly as possible around her scant waist, they were there. She recognized her mother at once and was a little surprised to find that she did not look old at all. If she hadn't been all in dark blue, with no makeup on her face, she wouldn't be bad-looking. She let her mother kiss her, but she kept her attention on the persons passing by. Suddenly she felt quite upset. Her skirt was too long; not a one of the girls in the station wore her skirt down to the ground. She hoped the Astor would have a needle and thread or, anyway, safety pins.

"There was no need for you to come with Doris," Mother said, her voice chilly now.

"I had business of my own to attend to," Father answered, and anger colored his face.

"And there's something else, too!" Doris called out brightly. "Tell her." She nodded at her mother.

"Oh." Father cleared his throat. "Yes, about tonight."

Before he could proceed, Doris leaned toward her mother to whisper concerning the where-abouts of the ladies' room. In there she could shorten her skirt by tucking part of it up in her belt until Father and she got in the hotel.

On her return, she wagged her little haunches as she walked, and quite a nice-looking boy turned to stare at her. The minute she saw Father's face, she knew something was up. If they had started in at each other, she didn't care. She hadn't come to New York to carry messages or to smooth their feelings. Let them start in, and tonight, when she had her date with Artie Wayne, why she would run off and elope with him; that is, if he asked her to.

Her father cleared his throat. "An unfortunate thing's happened," he said, and he was looking at her, not at Mother. "I telephoned the Astor while you were out there, you know, and they say they're full up."



"They're not!" she exclaimed furiously.

"Yes, you see, honey, they've got a convention there and every single room's taken."

She turned to her mother. "*Could* a thing like that happen in New York?" she said, beseeching her.

Her mother did not look directly at her. "Lots of conventions come here," she said.

Now Doris knew. She knew what he was doing. "How about other hotels?" she said grimly.

"Honey, I tried several, and none of them have rooms."

Saving money again, that was what he was doing, and her mother was just as bad, selfish, wanting her to stay with her the whole time she was in New York. She wanted to tell it to them, scream it at the top of her voice and then rush off down the stairs onto a train that would take her some place where she would never see them again. But she said, instead, her voice thin with misery: "What'll I do about Artie Wayne tonight?"

Her mother put her arm around her shoulders. "You can phone your friend and tell him to call for you at my place; it's not so far as you think."

"There's no such thing as distance in New York," her father announced with satisfaction.

"Call up a boy!" she said in a wail. "I couldn't call up a boy!"

But when her parents offered to perform the errand for her, she marched off into a booth, without a word.

The moment she saw the rooming house in which her mother lived, she made up her mind that she would go downstairs five minutes before Artie's proposed arrival. It would be better to take the chance of his thinking she had been hanging around, waiting for him, than to let him into the smelly hall, with its grimed walls and shabby staircase. Her mother's room didn't turn out to be so bad as she had

expected; the books and pillows sort of took the curse off, she decided. She answered her mother's questions perfunctorily and without interest until her mother started talking about clothes. Mother offered to hem up the purple silk dress; she even offered to lend her anything of hers she wanted.

Doris examined the wardrobe; all the dresses but the evening one were too dark and severe for her liking. If Artie wanted her to go to a dance or something tomorrow night, she would speak up for the evening dress. Neither did her mother's hats suit her, she decided, after twisting several on her head. But she consented to borrow the fur piece. It looked pretty neat over the camel's-hair coat. Her mother had not quite agreed, but she supposed that was because she was afraid it might be lost. She also borrowed a pair of gloves, remembering that all the girls she had seen in the station were wearing gloves. They were a little tight over her rings, but soft and clean.

As the time for Artie's arrival drew near, she tried all sorts of openings that would persuade her mother to stay in her room while she waited downstairs. Mother certainly was dense about it and went down with her when she finally said she wanted to call Roberta over the pay telephone in the downstairs hall. She hung on the phone longer than necessary, still hoping that Mother would become tired and leave her down there alone to open the door for Artie. In the middle of a sentence, the doorbell rang. She heard Mother introduce herself and was relieved that she would not have to call her by her maiden name. Loudly and with vivacity she said through the telephone: "Tomorrow then, *Rob*. I can't wait to see you!"

Then, affecting utter surprise, she turned to greet Artie. Once they were outside, she felt more like her old self.

But it was hard to think up something to say right off; she was relieved to hear his voice.

"Well, how do you like the Big City?" he said, pressing her arm.

"It's not so worse," she replied promptly, and then, for the life of her, she could not think of another thing to say.

It wasn't that he seemed much more New Yorky here than he had seemed when he was visiting in Wilmington. She liked New Yorky people. It was something else, and connected with the feeling that he had put up his nose at the rooming house or that he knew her father had been too stingy to pay for her at a hotel. It took all the life out of her during dinner. Afterward, when he proposed going to a movie that she had seen in Wilmington, she couldn't find the spirit to do anything but acquiesce.

In the motion-picture theater, she sat stiffly, keeping on her gloves and the fur piece for fear that she would lose them. She wondered if Artie knew the fur piece belonged to her mother and if he thought she was trying to dress up, the way little kids did. Perhaps he even thought her camel's-hair coat and new dress belonged to her mother.

Later, when he took her to a place for beer, she was still just like a lump. Pretty soon he stopped trying to make conversation, and they sat looking dully at their glasses of beer. On the way home, he took a taxicab. Riding in a taxicab was still enough of a novelty to stimulate her interest. She felt almost ready to say something that would show him she hadn't lost her tongue, or her brains, either, when he took her hand. Her mother's glove, ripping along a seam, sounded unduly loud to her ears and, drawing away her fingers, she said passionately: "Don't do that! You don't need to take pity on me!"

She paid no attention to his remonstrances and, once out

of the cab before the house, she ran up the brownstone steps too fleetly for him to catch up with her. Inside the dimly lighted hall there was no one to see her cry, but she sternly controlled her working lips. "How do you like the Big City?" *I hate it.*

Going up the stairs, she held her head defiantly. No, he hadn't asked her to elope with him, no, or asked if he could see her again, no, or even asked for her telephone number. Just such things as: "How do you like the Big City?" *I hate it!* She should have yelled it at him.

As she entered the room, her mother turned on the lamp near the bed. "Did you have a good time?" she said, sitting up, looking alert.

Doris managed a murmur, her head bent over the fraternity pins that she was detaching from her dress.

"Where did you go?" said her mother.

Don't you know? Can't you tell? You and Father are always trying to ruin my life. And aloud she said in a colorless voice: "Here and there."

"Why don't you tell me, Doris? I'm really interested. What did you do?"

She would never let them know, to gloat over it, and she would never forgive them, either, not a one of them. They would all be sorry some day, but she wasn't going to give them a chance to be now. And, turning a bored face to her mother, she said in a tone of deadly carelessness: "Oh, the usual thing one does in what Artie laughingly calls the Big City."



## THE ORATORY CONTEST<sup>1</sup>

BY JAMES T. FARRELL

*He was an honest man and work was honorable. What if he was a motorman and some of the fathers of Gerry's classmates were higher up on the ladder than he? America was a democratic country. Still, he knew that he would feel out of place. He wished he hadn't come. Gerry, instead of waiting for him had gone on ahead. Gerry, he suddenly felt, was ashamed. . . .*

### I

FACING the bathroom mirror, Gerry O'Dell practised for the contest, and he imagined the thunder of applause that would greet him at the conclusion of his oration. His mother called him, and he said that he was coming. He met his dad in the hallway, and Mr. O'Dell looked at his narrow-faced, small, sixteen-year-old son with a mingling of pride and humility.

"Well, Gerry, how do you feel? The old soupbone in your throat loosened up?" the father asked.

"Yes, Dad," Gerry nervously answered.

"Gerry, your mother and I are mighty proud of you, and we'll be giving you all the . . . the moral support we can tonight. Don't get worried because you're speaking in public, or because of the size of the crowd. Ah, anyway,

<sup>1</sup> From *Can All This Grandeur Perish?* by James T. Farrell (New York, The Vanguard Press, 1937).

Gerry, oratory is certainly a great gift for a boy to have," the father said, putting his hairy hands into his blue trouser pockets and rocking backward on his heels. "Gerry, if a man has the makings of a great orator in him, he need have no fears of getting ahead in life."

"George, don't be making the boy nervous. Gerald, supper is ready," the mother called.

"Martha, I was only explaining to him," the father apologetically explained.

"Father, you mustn't be saying any more now," she said in a nagging tone.

The father followed his son into the dining room, and he seemed to have been hurt as the family sat down for supper.

"Well, Sis, how did school go today?" the father asked, cutting into his lamb chop and looking at his pig-tailed daughter while Gerry talked with his brother, Michael, about Sister Sylvester, the eighth-grade teacher at Saint Catherine's grammar school.

"I was spelled down," Ellen said.

"What word did you miss, Sis?"

"Interest, Daddy."

"Maybe you'll do better the next time."

"But, gee, Daddy, I tried so hard. I could have cried right then and there like a baby," she said.

"That's just too bad! Too bad that you couldn't show off before Georgie Schaeffer," Michael said, making a wry face at his sister.

"Is that so!"

Mrs. O'Dell told her younger children to stop arguing and eat their supper. It was no time to be disturbing Gerald. The family ate, and the father cast continued glances of approval and pride at his oldest son.

"Gerry, where did you learn the things you're talking

about tonight? You must certainly have studied a lot to learn them," the father said.

"I read the Constitution, and the editorials on it that have been printed recently in *The Chicago Questioner*. And then, of course, there was my civics course, and Father Robert gave me lots of suggestions, and he spent an awful lot of time helping me rehearse my speech. He helped me get it written and to get my delivery set in my mind," Gerry said.

"Gerry, when I heard you give your oration at the semi-finals, I was a mighty proud father, I was."

Gerry smiled self-consciously.

"After you finish high school, you'll have to go to college. I want you to get a fine education."

"But, Dad, how can I?" Gerry said, looking hopefully at his father.

"You ought to be able to get a job and study law in the evenings down town at Saint Vincent's."

"That's what I'll have to do," Gerry said disconsolately.

"Of course, something might turn up," the father said.

"George, that is what you've been saying for twenty years," Mrs. O'Dell said sarcastically.

"Martha, you can't say that I ain't tried. I've provided for you and the children as well as I could, and I always brought my pay home to you untouched. I don't see where you have any right to complain when a man has always done his best."

"George, I'm not complaining. It's just that after all these years I'm tired out. Look how long we're married, and we don't even own our own home."

"We will yet. I mean it! I swear we will! A fellow at the barns was telling me yesterday that he can get a ticket on the English Sweepstakes. Now suppose I should win that! One hundred thousand dollars! Say, we'd be rolling in

wealth. You know, Martha, you never can tell what will happen in life. Now last year, I remember reading in the papers where some foreigner, a cook in some New York hotel, won over a hundred thousand dollars on a sweepstakes ticket."

"And you're not that cook. You've been talking yourself blue in the face about winning in baseball pools almost as long as I can remember. And what have you won? What?"

"Didn't I win twenty-five dollars on a baseball pool last year?"

"Yes, and how much did you spend buying tickets during the year?"

"Gee, give a man a chance."

"Give you a chance! That's all I've ever given you."

"Have it your way then. But three years ago Tom Foley, who runs a car on Western Avenue, won five hundred, didn't he? If he can have luck like that, what's to stop me from having it?"

"You're not Tom Foley."

"Aw, Ma!" O'Dell whined, causing Gerry to glance at him quickly in disgust.

"I can't be listening to all your nonsense, George. I got to see that the boys get ready for tonight," she said when they had finished their tea and dessert.

"Gee, Ma, are you sure you can't come?" Gerry said as she arose from the table, a small, broad, fat-checked woman in her forties whose stomach was swollen out.

"Gerald, your mother isn't feeling up to snuff this evening. But I'll be thinking of you, speaking, and saying a prayer to the Lord that you'll win the prize. Your mother knows that her son is going to take the prize, and she'll be just as happy whether she hears you or not, just as long as you telephone me the minute you get out of the hall," the mother said.



"Ma, can I go?" the sister asked.

"You got to stay home with your mother," the father said while Gerry kissed Mrs. O'Dell good-bye and left.

## II

Mrs. O'Dell sat knitting baby socks in the dining room, and the daughter was bent over her school books at the table. The father entered the cramped room and asked his wife for some money. She slowly arose and waddled to their bedroom. She drew a two-dollar bill from a large leather pocketbook and handed it to him.

"George, I get spells. I'm afraid," she said.

"Don't worry, Martha. Gerry is a chip off the old block, and he has the makings of a fine orator. Why, he already orates better than a lot of lawyers and politicians I've heard," he said.

"It's not that, George. I'm too old now and this one is going to be a harder ordeal than when I was younger and had the others. Oh, George, I'm afraid! I can't bear to think of leaving you and the children without their mother."

Worried, he gently patted her back, tenderly caressed her unkempt black hair.

"I feel as if I can't carry the load inside of me. And my back gets so sore. I had a dream last night, and it's a premonition. I fear I shan't be pulling through. Oh, George, hold me, kiss me like you used to a long time ago! I can't bear it, the thought of dying and leaving you with an infant baby."

She sobbed in his arms. Holding her, he felt as if paralyzed. He sensed in her the mystery of woman which enabled them to bring forth a man's child. He was filled with respect, awed into speechlessness. He kissed her, clasped her tightly, his feelings reverential. He thought of how they

were going along now, and of how they were past knowing and feeling again what they had known and felt in those first burning days of their marriage. Now it was just having sympathy with each other, being used to one another, having their family, their duties, and the obligations which they had to meet together, the feeling of liking, more than loving, each other, and wanting to be proud of their kids. He kissed her again.

Michael called his dad from the doorway. The parents blushed with embarrassment. They turned their heads aside. The father gruffly told his son that he was coming. He kissed his wife a final good-bye.

### III

It was a muggy, misty March evening. Walking to the street-car line with his son, O'Dell turned memories of other times over and over in his mind. He remembered his courtship and the days when he was younger and had worked nights, and of how at this time, on this kind of a night, he would be driving his car along Ashland Avenue. He wished that it were still those days and that he were young instead of a motorman rapidly getting old as his family was beginning to grow up. It was strange now to think of himself in other days, to think of what he had been, to realize how he had not at all known what life had in store for himself and his young bride. And now they both knew. And just to think that there had been a time when this boy, Michael, beside him had not been born, and neither had Gerry. Gerry had once been in his mother's womb just as the latest newcomer was at this very moment. He remembered the coming of his three children, Martha's shrieks and agonies, his own apprehensions and worries, the helpless feeling that

had come over him, the drowsy tiredness on Martha's face after each delivery. He was afraid for it to happen all over again, afraid that this new one was going to mean trouble. *Death!* He wished that it were over with. Yes, and he wished that he were a young motorman again, instead of being pretty close on toward the declining years of middle age. He shook his head wistfully, thinking of how now, for years, day after day, he had driven street cars. And he had been driving them before the boy at his side was born, and even before Gerry had been on the way. Gerry had turned out fine, but not just exactly what he had imagined Gerry would be. Ah, nothing in life turned out just as a man imagined that it would turn out. And this new one? When it would be Gerry's age, he and Martha, if the Lord spared them both, they would be old. He trembled at the thought of this new one, and it turned his mind to thoughts of the years, of death, the end of them both.

"Mickey, you always want to be good to your mother. Help her all you can while you've got her, because you'll never realize how much she means to you until she's gone," he said.

"Yes, Dad," the boy dutifully replied, the father's words merely giving him the feeling that the old man was just preaching a little in order to hear himself talk.

"You won't have her with you always, you know."

They boarded a street car and stood on the rear platform talking with the conductor who was a friend of Mr. O'Dell's. O'Dell told his friend where they were going and why. The conductor told O'Dell that one of his girls was a smart one like that, too, and she had just won a prize button in school for writing. But anyway, that girl of his, she was a great kid, and a smart one, too. Then they had to get off at Sixty-third Street and change for an eastbound car.

## IV

O'Dell became increasingly timid as the car approached the school auditorium of Mary Our Mother. He tried to force a feeling of reassurance upon himself, thinking that he was just as good as any man, telling himself that he was a free-born American who earned his living by honest work. He had just as much right as any man to come to this contest and hear his own boy whom he was educating out of his hard-earned money. He was an honest man, and work was honorable, and what if he was a motorman and some of the fathers of Gerry's classmates were higher up on the ladder than he? No, there was no need of his being ashamed. America was a democratic country. Still, he was shy. He knew that he would feel out of place. But he was proud of his son, and he knew that Gerry was going to win out over the sons of richer fathers, and . . . he felt that he just wouldn't be in place, and that maybe he shouldn't have come.

And he realized that Gerry, instead of waiting for him and Michael, had gone ahead. Gerry, he suddenly felt, was ashamed of him. He argued with himself that the boy had had to get there early, and that, anyway, he had been nervous about the contest and restless, like a colt before the start of a race. But still, no, he could not rid his mind of that thought.

He noticed other people on the sidewalk, walking in the same direction as he, and he heard them talking. Some of them sounded like parents, and he was sure that many of them must be the fathers and mothers of boys who went to Mary Our Mother. Did any of them, he wondered, have thoughts such as he? Well, before this evening was over they were all going to know about Gerald O'Dell.

And at home, there was Martha, her body big and swollen. He wished that she had come along. And she was at

home, knitting away. He was responsible for her condition, and if he had curbed himself, well, they wouldn't be having this worry and this danger, and all the expense and sacrifice that it would involve, and she would be at his side, and they would both be so proud and happy, hearing Gerry win with his oration. How good it would be to have Martha at his side, both of them hearing the whole auditorium applaud her boy, her own flesh and blood. And she would not be granted this pleasure. He could just see her at home, knitting, silent, afraid. And she was going to be hurt, and this new child was going to be, maybe, so hard at her age, and oh, God forbid that she should die.

In front of the auditorium, he saw boys of varying ages, some only a year or so older than his Michael, other lads of seventeen and eighteen in long pants. He looked about to see if Gerry were among them, but he wasn't. He would like to tell them who he was, the father of Gerry O'Dell.

"Mike, here we are," he said in an attempt to be whimsical.

He handed two complimentary tickets to the lad collecting them at the door, and in a humble mood he followed the usher to seats in the center of the auditorium. He looked shyly about the lighted hall, seeing a confusion of strange faces, the people moving down the aisles to seats, and he was excited and expectant. He wanted it to begin. He glanced up toward the stage, with the stand and a row of chairs in front of the drawn red curtain. The boys, judges and the honored guests, including a number of priests, some of whom might be Gerry's teachers, would all sit in those chairs. And again he felt out of place, humbly so. He felt that in the auditorium there must be the fathers of many of Gerry's classmates, men who had gone so much further in the world than he had, men who could afford to send their sons to good colleges.

He remembered the sight of the lads outside, and it caused him to think of how Gerry must have an entire life closed out to his father and mother, a life they could never get their little fingers on. He glanced sidewise at Michael, who was awkwardly twisting in his seat and looking about at faces with a boy's alive and curious eyes. And what did he see? What? Michael, too, and the girl, they had their lives that were closed to their father and mother, and as they grew older they would both drift further and further away.

"Like it, Mickey?" he asked, wanting to get close to his son, to be like a pal with him.

Michael smiled, muttered an absorbed uhuh.

"Some day you'll be going to the school here, too, and maybe, like Gerry, you'll be winning oratorical contests and prizes."

"I'd rather be on the football team."

"Maybe you can do both."

Michael smiled frankly, and the father suddenly found his mood dissipating under the smile. He did not feel himself to be such a stranger to Michael.

## V

He was conscious of the movement of people, priests in the rear, the hall filling up, and he guessed that it was going to start. Suddenly the orchestra began a scratchy prelude, and O'Dell told himself that it must be fine music. Like those around him, he sat quiet, a little hushed. Glad, too, that it was starting. He waited, entertained but anxious, through the elocution contests, when first-year students recited pieces. The junior contest followed, and four boys delivered famous orations. O'Dell thought that the tall boy who delivered a speech of Senator Hoar's defending the retention of the Philippine Islands, had been the best. All of

them had been good, but his boy would be better. And that was what he was waiting for.

He heard more music, idly reflecting that the priests here at Mary Our Mother must be giving the boys a good education. Anxiety was working within him like a pump. Right after the music Gerry would speak. He gripped and clasped his hands. Michael stirred. He tapped him, whispering to be quiet and to act well-mannered. The music, carried through by violins, seemed like the distant sounds of a waterfall, and they lulled within him. Dreamily he visualized Gerry speaking, imagined the lad's future as a great lawyer, and he thought of how boys in oratorical contests such as this one would, in years to come, be delivering the famous speeches and orations of Senator Gerald O'Dell. Gerald O'Dell, his son, the boy whose education had cost him sacrifices.

And now Gerry, small and freckled, was on the platform. He seemed so calm, as if there was not a worry in his head. He stood there, straight, dignified, and, ah, but wouldn't he be a pride to his father in the years to come. He was speaking. O'Dell leaned forward, listening attentively as his son's deep and full voice carried down the auditorium.

*So the first step is, what is the Constitution?*

O'Dell was in a spell, completely under the sway of his son's words, and he nodded his head as Gerry's voice rose in the final introductory statement which suggested that the United States and the Constitution are inseparable, and that without one there could not be the other.

*And to all of us who are true Americans, our Constitution is sacred, the creed of those rights which are guaranteed to every one of us as an enduring pledge of our liberties.*

Gerry spoke without halt, retaining not only the absorbed attention of his father but also of nearly everyone in the auditorium. He continued, declaiming that the defense

of the Constitution, and of the principles which it embodied, was a sacred duty to be held inviolable, and that he who did not, nor would not, uphold these principles did not deserve to be called an American. He added that he who holds public office and willingly betrays his trust cannot be called an American. But in his talk he was not primarily interested in such men, even though they wantonly betrayed their public trust. He was concerned with something more vital, the betrayal of the fundamental principles on which the Constitution was founded, that of state's rights, individual liberty. And men, men in public affairs, were, because of ignorance or perversity or even malice, seeking to destroy that principle by advocating the passage of a Federal Maternity Act and a law establishing a Federal Educational Department. These men wanted to abolish child labor by an act of Congress, even though the Constitution did not grant this prerogative to Congress.

O'Dell smiled when the boy quoted the late Champ Clark.

*If the groups seeking Federal assistance would put their burdens on the state legislatures where they belong, Congress would have time for the work which, under the Constitution, belongs to Congress.*

Continuing, Gerry referred to this tendency toward centralization, seeking to prove that it was unjustified. And then, with cleanly contrived gestures and a rising voice, he concluded:

*Should we allow our rights to be taken from us? No! Wherever this tendency to centralization shows its serpentine head, we shall fight it, because it is a menace to us, to every one who is a liberty-loving American, and we must fight this menace. And defending our liberties, we shall take a slogan from some recent words of a Cabinet member, Herbert Hoover: "It is time to decentralize." Our forefathers, Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, fought to give us our*



*rights. Shall we let them be stripped away from us? Never! We will defend our rights. We will raise our voices until we are heard and our voices resound. Yes, we will even shout: It is time to decentralize.*

Gerry O'Dell bowed to the audience. He turned and walked to his place among the others on the stage, while the applause thundered. The father clapped himself weary, restraining strong impulses to shout and stamp his feet. Tears welled in his eyes. He smiled with a simple and childlike joy. Unable to check himself, he turned to the man on his left and said:

"That's my boy."

"Smart lad."

The remaining speeches in the senior oratorical contest seemed dull and uninteresting to him. His boy had it all over these other lads. And he felt himself justified in these impressions when the judges announced their decisions, and amid a second strong burst of clapping Gerald O'Dell was announced the winner of the gold medal in the Senior Oratorical Contest. O'Dell rushed out to a drugstore to telephone the news to Martha. Then he and Michael went back. The tag end of the crowd was filtering out. Boys were coming out in groups, standing, talking, dispersing with the crowd. He searched for Gerry. Gerry would certainly have waited. A boy came out. It was Gerry. No! He searched again. Gerry must be inside, being congratulated. He went in, but found the stage empty. Gerry must have gone. He told himself that Gerry had known that his father would wait to see him, congratulate him, buy him a treat, and that then they would go home together. And Gerry had not waited. He still looked anxiously about at the disappearing faces. Where was he? He asked a boy in a lingering group of students if any of them had seen Gerald O'Dell. They hadn't. He said that he was Gerald's father. They said

Gerald had spoken well and deserved his victory. He stood with Michael. Only a few scattered groups remained in front of the hall. Feeling blank, he told himself, yes, Gerry had gone. He solemnly led Michael away, both of them silent. He asked himself why Gerry hadn't waited, and he knew the answer to his question.



## I'M A FOOL <sup>1</sup>

BY SHERWOOD ANDERSON

*And maybe she would write me and the letter would come back stamped on the front "there ain't any such guy." And me trying to pass myself off for a big bug and a swell. A fine chance I got. I hope I get cancer and die.*

It was a hard jolt for me, one of the most bitterest I ever had to face. And it all came about through my own foolishness, too. Even yet sometimes, when I think of it, I want to cry or swear or kick myself. Perhaps, even now, after all this time, there will be a kind of satisfaction in making myself look cheap by telling of it.

It began at three o'clock one October afternoon as I sat in the grand stand at the fall trotting and pacing meet at Sandusky, Ohio.

To tell the truth, I felt a little foolish that I should be sitting in the grand stand at all. During the summer before I had left my home town with Harry Whitehead and, with a nigger named Burt, had taken a job as swipec with one of the two horses Harry was campaigning through the fall race meets that year. Mother cried and my sister Mildred, who wanted to get a job as a school-teacher in our town that fall, stormed and scolded about the house all during the week before I left. They both thought it something disgraceful that one of our family should take a place as a swipec with

<sup>1</sup> From *Horses and Men* by Sherwood Anderson. Copyright, 1923. Published by the Viking Press, Inc.

race horses. I've an idea Mildred thought my taking the place would stand in the way of her getting the job she'd been working so long for.

But, after all, I had to work, and there was no other work to be got. A big lumbering fellow of nineteen couldn't just hang around the house and I had got too big to mow people's lawns and sell newspapers. Little chaps who could get next to people's sympathies by their size were always getting jobs away from me. There was one fellow who kept saying to every one who wanted a lawn mowed or a cistern cleaned, that he was saving money to work his way through college, and I used to lay awake nights thinking up ways to injure him without being found out. I kept thinking of wagons running over him and bricks falling on his head as he walked along the street. But never mind him.

I got the place with Harry and I liked Burt fine. We got along splendid together. He was a big nigger with a lazy sprawling body and soft kind eyes, and when it came to a fight he could hit like Jack Johnson. He had Bucephalus, a big black pacing stallion that could do 2.09 or 2.10, if he had to, and I had a little gelding named Doctor Fritz that never lost a race all fall when Harry wanted him to win.

We set out from home late in July in a box car with the two horses, and after that, until late November, we kept moving along to the race meets and the fairs. It was a peachy time for me, I'll say that. Sometimes now I think that boys who are raised regular in houses, and never have a fine nigger like Burt for best friend, and go to high schools and college, and never steal anything, or get drunk a little, or learn to swear from fellows who know how, or come walking up in front of a grand stand in their shirt sleeves and with dirty horsy pants on when the races are going on and the grand stand is full of people all dressed up— What's the use of talk-

ing about it? Such fellows don't know nothing at all. They've never had no opportunity.

But I did. Burt taught me how to rub down a horse and put the bandages on after a race and steam a horse out and a lot of valuable things for any man to know. He could wrap a bandage on a horse's leg so smooth that if it had been the same color you would think it was his skin, and I guess he'd have been a big driver, too, and got to the top like Murphy and Walter Cox and the others if he hadn't been black.

Gee whizz! it was fun. You got to a county-seat town, maybe say on a Saturday or Sunday, and the fair began the next Tuesday and lasted until Friday afternoon. Doctor Fritz would be, say, in the 2.25 trot on Tuesday afternoon and on Thursday afternoon Bucephalus would knock 'em cold in the "free-for-all" pace. It left you a lot of time to hang around and listen to horse talk, and see Burt knock some yap cold that got gay, and you'd find out about horses and men and pick up a lot of stuff you could use all the rest of your life, if you had some sense and salted down what you heard and felt and saw.

And then at the end of the week when the race meet was over, and Harry had run home to tend up to his livery-stable business, you and Burt hitched the two horses to carts and drove slow and steady across country, to the place for the next meeting, so as to not overheat the horses, etc., etc., you know.

Gee whizz! Gosh a'mighty! the nice hickory-nut and beechnut and oaks and other kinds of trees along the roads, all brown and red, and the good smells, and Burt singing a song called "Deep River," and the country girls at the windows of houses and everything. You can stick your colleges up your nose for all me. I guess I know where I got my education.

Why, one of those little burgs of towns you come to on the way, say now on a Saturday afternoon, and Burt says, "Let's lay up here." And you did.

And you took the horses to a livery stable and fed them, and you got your good clothes out of a box and put them on.

And the town was full of farmers gaping, because they could see you were race-horse people, and the kids maybe never see a nigger before and was afraid and run away when the two of us walked down their main street.

And that was before prohibition and all that foolishness, and so you went into a saloon, the two of you, and all the yaps come and stood around, and there was always some one pretended he was horsy and knew things and spoke up and began asking questions, and all you did was to lie and lie all you could about what horses you had, and I said I owned them, and then some fellow said, "Will you have a drink of whisky?" and Burt knocked his eye out the way he could say, offhand like, "Oh well, all right, I'm agreeable to a little nip. I'll split a quart with you." Gee whizz!

But that isn't what I want to tell my story about. We got home late in November and I promised mother I'd quit the race horses for good. There's a lot of things you've got to promise a mother because she don't know any better.

And so, there not being any work in our town any more than when I left there to go to the races, I went off to Sandusky and got a pretty good place taking care of horses for a man who owned a teaming and delivery and storage and coal and real-estate business there. It was a pretty good place with good eats, and a day off each week, and sleeping on a cot in a big barn, and mostly just shoveling in hay and oats to a lot of big good-enough skates of horses that couldn't have trotted a race with a toad. I wasn't dissatisfied and I could send money home.

And then, as I started to tell you, the fall races come to

Sandusky and I got the day off and I went. I left the job at noon and had on my good clothes and my new brown derby hat I'd bought the Saturday before, and a stand-up collar.

First of all I went down town and walked about with the dudes. I've always thought to myself, "Put up a good front," and so I did it. I had forty dollars in my pocket and so I went into the West House, a big hotel, and walked up to the cigar stand. "Give me three twenty-five-cent cigars," I said. There was a lot of horsemen and strangers and dressed-up people from other towns standing around in the lobby and in the bar, and I mingled amongst them. In the bar there was a fellow with a cane and a Windsor tie on, that it made me sick to look at him. I like a man to be a man and dress up, but not to go put on that kind of airs. So I pushed him aside, kind of rough, and had me a drink of whisky. And then he looked at me, as though he thought maybe he'd get gay, but he changed his mind and didn't say anything. And then I had another drink of whisky, just to show him something, and went out and had a hack out to the races, all to myself, and when I got there I bought myself the best seat I could get up in the grand stand, but didn't go in for any of these boxes. That's putting on too many airs.

And so there I was, sitting up in the grand stand as gay as you please and looking down on the swipes coming out with their horses, and with their dirty horsey pants on and the horse blankets swung over their shoulders, same as I had been doing all the year before. I liked one thing about the same as the other, sitting up there and feeling grand and being down there and looking up at the yaps and feeling grander and more important, too.

One thing's about as good as another, if you take it just right. I've often said that.

Well, right in front of me, in the grand stand that day,

there was a fellow with a couple of girls and they was about my age. The young fellow was a nice guy, all right. He was the kind maybe that goes to college and then comes to be a lawyer or maybe a newspaper editor or something like that, but he wasn't stuck on himself. There are some of that kind are all right and he was one of the ones.

He had his sister with him and another girl and the sister looked around over his shoulder, accidental at first, not intending to start anything—she wasn't that kind—and her eyes and mine happened to meet.

You know how it is. Gee! she was a peach! She had on a soft dress, kind of blue stuff, and it looked carelessly made, but was well sewed and made and everything. I knew that much. I blushed when she looked right at me and so did she. She was the nicest girl I've ever seen in my life. She wasn't stuck on herself and she could talk proper grammar without being like a school-teacher or something like that. What I mean is, she was O.K. I think maybe her father was well-to-do, but not rich to make her chesty because she was his daughter, as some are. Maybe he owned a drug store or a drygoods store in their home town, or something like that. She never told me and I never asked.

My own people are all O.K. too, when you come to that. My grandfather was Welsh and over in the old country, in Wales he was— But never mind that.

The first heat of the first race come off and the young fellow setting there with the two girls left them and went down to make a bet. I knew what he was up to, but he didn't talk big and noisy and let every one around know he was a sport, as some do. He wasn't that kind. Well, he come back and I heard him tell the two girls what horse he'd bet on, and when the heat was trotted they all half got to their feet and acted in the excited, sweaty way people do when they've got money down on the race, and the horse they bet on is up



there pretty close at the end, and they think maybe he'll come on with a rush, but he never does because he hasn't got the old juice in him, come right down to it.

And then, pretty soon, the horses came out for the 2.18 pace and there was a horse in it I knew. He was a horse Bob French had in his string, but Bob didn't own him. He was a horse owned by a Mr. Mathers down at Marietta, Ohio.

This Mr. Mathers had a lot of money and owned some coal mines or something, and he had a swell place out in the country, and he was stuck on race horses, but he was a Presbyterian or something, and I think more than likely his wife was one, too, maybe a stiffer one than himself. So he never raced his horses hisself, and the story round the Ohio race tracks was that when one of his horses got ready to go to the races he turned him over to Bob French and pretended to his wife he was sold.

So Bob had the horses and he did pretty much as he pleased, and you can't blame Bob; at least, I never did. Sometimes he was out to win and sometimes he wasn't. I never cared much about that when I was swiping a horse. What I did want to know was that my horse had the speed and could go out in front, if you wanted him to.

And, as I'm telling you, there was Bob in this race with one of Mr. Mathers' horses, was named About Ben Ahem or something like that, and was fast as a streak. He was a gelding and had a mark of 2.21, but could step in .08 or .09.

Because when Burt and I were out, as I've told you, the year before, there was a nigger Burt knew, worked for Mr. Mathers, and we went out there one day when we didn't have no race on at the Marietta Fair, and our boss Harry was gone home.

And so every one was gone to the fair but just this one nigger and he took us all through Mr. Mathers' swell house and he and Burt tapped a bottle of wine Mr. Mathers had hid

in his bedroom, back in a closet, without his wife knowing, and he showed us his Ahem horse. Burt was always stuck on being a driver, but didn't have much chance to get to the top, being a nigger, and he and the other nigger gulped that whole bottle of wine and Burt got a little lit up.

So the nigger let Burt take this About Ben Ahem and step him a mile in a track Mr. Mathers had all to himself, right there on the farm. And Mr. Mathers had one child, a daughter, kinda sick and not very good-looking, and she came home and we had to hustle and get About Ben Ahem stuck back in the barn.

I'm only telling you to get everything straight. At Sandusky, that afternoon I was at the fair, this young fellow with the two girls was fussed, being with the girls and losing his bet. You know how a fellow is that way. One of them was his girl and the other his sister. I had figured that out.

"Gee whizz!" I says to myself, "I'm going to give him the dope."

He was right nice when I touched him on the shoulder. He and the girls were nice to me right from the start and clear to the end. I'm not blaming them.

And so he leaned back and I give him the dope on About Ben Ahem. "Don't bet a cent on this first heat because he'll go like an oxen hitched to a plow, but when the first heat is over go right down and lay on your pile." That's what I told him.

Well, I never saw a fellow treat any one sweller. There was a fat man sitting beside the little girl, that had looked at me twice by this time, and I at her, and both blushing, and what did he do but have the nerve to turn and ask the fat man to get up and change places with me so I could set with his crowd.

Gee whizz! Craps amighty! There I was. What a chump I was to go and get gay up there in the West House bar, and

just because that dude was standing there with a cane and that kind of a necktie on, to go and get all balled up and drink that whisky, just to show off!

Of course she would know, me sitting right beside her and letting her smell of my breath. I could have kicked myself right down out of that grand stand and all around that race track and made a faster record than most of the skates of horses they had there that year.

Because that girl wasn't any mutt of a girl. What wouldn't I have give right then for a stick of chewing gum to chew, or a lozenger, or some licorice, or most anything. I was glad I had those twenty-five-cent cigars in my pocket and right away I give that fellow one and lit one myself. Then that fat man got up and we changed places and there I was, plunked right down beside her.

They introduced themselves and the fellow's best girl, he had with him, was named Miss Elinor Woodbury, and her father was a manufacturer of barrels from a place called Tiffin, Ohio. And the fellow himself was named Wilbur Wessen and his sister was Miss Lucy Wessen.

I suppose it was their having such swell names got me off my trolley. A fellow, just because he has been a swipe with a race horse, and works taking care of horses for a man in the teaming, delivery, and storage business, isn't any better or worse than any one else. I've often thought that, and said it, too.

But you know how a fellow is. There's something in that kind of nice clothes, and the kind of nice eyes she had, and the way she had looked at me, a while before, over her brother's shoulder, and me looking back at her, and both of us blushing.

I couldn't show her up for a boob, could I?

I made a fool of myself, that's what I did. I said my name was Walter Mathers from Marietta, Ohio, and then I told

all three of them the smashingest lie you ever heard. What I said was that my father owned the horse About Ben Ahem and that he had let him out to this Bob French for racing purposes, because our family was proud and had never gone into racing that way—in our own name, I mean. Then I had got started and they were all leaning over and listening, and Miss Lucy Wessen's eyes were shining, and I went the whole hog.

I told about our place down at Marietta, and about the big stables and the grand brick house we had on a hill, up above the Ohio River, but I knew enough not to do it in no bragging way. What I did was to start things and then let them drag the rest out of me. I acted just as reluctant to tell as I could. Our family hasn't got any barrel factory, and, since I've known us, we've always been pretty poor, but not asking anything of any one at that, and my grandfather, over in Wales— But never mind that.

We set there talking like we had known each other for years and years, and I went and told them that my father had been expecting maybe this Bob French wasn't on the square, and had sent me up to Sandusky on the sly to find out what I could.

And I bluffed it through. I had found out all about the 2.18 pace, in which About Ben Ahem was to start.

I said he would lose the first heat by pacing like a lame cow and then he would come back and skin 'em alive after that. And to back up what I said I took thirty dollars out of my pocket and handed it to Mr. Wilbur Wessen and asked him would he mind, after the first heat, to go down and place it on About Ben Ahem for whatever odds he could get. What I said was that I didn't want Bob French to see me, and none of the swipes.

Sure enough, the first heat came off and About Ben Ahem went off his stride, up the back stretch, and looked like a

wooden horse or a sick one, and come in to be last. Then this Wilbur Wessen went down to the betting place under the grand stand and there I was with the two girls, and when that Miss Woodbury was looking the other way once, Lucy Wessen kinda, with her shoulder you know, kinda touched me. Not just tucking down, I don't mean. You know how a woman can do. They get close, but not getting gay, either. You know what they do. Gee whizz!

And then they give me a jolt. What they had done, when I didn't know, was to get together, and they had decided Wilbur Wessen would bet fifty dollars, and the two girls had gone and put in ten dollars each, of their own money, too. I was sick then, but I was sicker later.

About the gelding, About Ben Ahem, and their winning their money, I wasn't worried a lot about that. It come out O.K. Ahem stepped the next three heats like a bushel of spoiled eggs going to market before they could be found out, and Wilbur Wessen got nine to two for the money. There was something else eating at me.

Because Wilbur come back, after he had bet the money, and after that he spent most of his time talking to that Miss Woodbury, and Lucy Wessen and I was left alone together like on a desert island. Gee! if I'd only been on the square or if there had been any way of getting myself on the square. There ain't any Walter Mathers, like I said to her and them, and there hasn't ever been one, but if there was, I bet I'd go to Marietta, Ohio, and shoot him tomorrow.

There I was, big boob that I am. Pretty soon the race was over, and Wilbur had gone down and collected our money, and we had a hack downtown, and he stood us a swell supper at the West House, and a bottle of champagne beside.

And I was with that girl and she wasn't saying much, and I wasn't saying much, either. One thing I know. She wasn't stuck on me because of the lie about my father being rich

and all that. There's a way you know. . . . Craps amighty! There's a kind of a girl you see just once in your life, and if you don't get busy and make hay, then you're gone for good and all, and might as well go jump off a bridge. They give you a look from inside of them somewhere, and it ain't no vamping, and what it means is—you want that girl to be your wife, and you want nice things around her like flowers and swell clothes, and you want her to have the kids you're going to have, and you want good music played and no ragtime. Gee whizz!

There's a place over near Sandusky, across a kind of bay, and it's called Cedar Point. And after we had supper we went over to it in a launch, all by ourselves. Wilbur and Miss Lucy and that Miss Woodbury had to catch a ten-o'clock train back to Tiffin, Ohio, because when you're out with girls like that you can't get careless and miss any trains and stay out all night, like you can with some kind of Janes.

And Wilbur blowed himself to the launch and it cost him fifteen cold plunks, but I wouldn't never have knew if I hadn't listened. He wasn't no tin-horn kind of a sport.

Over at the Cedar Point place, we didn't stay around where there was a gang of common kind of cattle at all.

There was big dance halls and dining places for yaps, and there was a beach you could walk along and get where it was dark, and we went there.

She didn't talk hardly at all, and neither did I, and I was thinking how glad I was my mother was all right, and always made us kids learn to eat with a fork at table, and not swill soup, and not be noisy and rough like a gang you see around a race track that way.

Then Wilbur and his girl went away up the beach and Lucy and I sat down in a dark place, where there was some roots of old trees and water had washed up, and after that the time, till we had to go back in the launch and they had

to catch their train, wasn't nothing at all. It went like winking your eye.

Here's how it was. The place we were sitting in was dark, like I said, and there was the roots from that old stump sticking up like arms, and there was a watery smell, and then the night was like—as if you could put your hand out and feel it—so warm and soft and dark and sweet like an orange.

I most cried and I most swore and I most jumped up and danced, I was so mad and happy and sad.

When Wilbur came back from being alone with his girl, and she saw him coming, Lucy she says, "We got to go to the train now," and she was most crying, too, but she never knew nothing I knew, and she couldn't be so all busted up. And then, before Wilbur and Miss Woodbury got up to where we was, she put her face up and kissed me and she was all quivering and—Gee whizz!

Sometimes I hope I have cancer and die. I guess you know what I mean. We went in the launch across the bay to the train like that, and it was dark, too. She whispered and said it was like she and I could get out of the boat and walk on the water, and it sounded foolish, but I knew what she meant.

And then quick we were right at the depot, and there was a big gang of yaps, the kind that goes to the fairs, and crowded and milling around like cattle, and how could I tell her? "It won't be long because you'll write and I'll write to you." That's all she said.

I got a chance like a hay-barn afire. A swell chance I got.

And maybe she would write me, down at Marietta that way, and the letter would come back, and stamped on the front of it by the U.S.A. "there ain't any such guy," or something like that, whatever they stamp on a letter that way.

And me trying to pass myself off for a big bug and a swell

—to her, as decent a little body as God ever made. Craps amighty! a swell chance I got!

And then the train come in, and she got on it, and Wilbur Wessen he come and shook hands with me, and that Miss Woodbury was nice too and bowed to me, and I at her, and the train went and I busted out and cried like a kid.

Gee! I could have run after that train and made Dan Patch look like a freight train after a wreck, but socks amighty! what was the use? Did you ever see such a fool?

I'll bet you what—if I had an arm broke right now or a train had run over my foot—I wouldn't go to no doctor at all. I'd go set down and let her hurt and hurt—that's what I'd do. I'll bet you what—if I hadn't 'a' drunk that booze I'd 'a' never been such a boob as to go tell such a lie—that couldn't never be made straight to a lady like her.

I wish I had that fellow right here that had on a Windsor tie and carried a cane. I'd smash him for fair. Gosh darn his eyes! He's a big fool—that's what he is.

And if I'm not another you just go find me one and I'll quit working and be a bum and give him my job. I don't care nothing for working, and earning money and saving it for no such boob as myself.





## FIVE RIPE PEARS<sup>1</sup>

BY WILLIAM SAROYAN

*If old man Pollard is still alive I hope he reads this because I want him to know I am not a thief and never have been. No hard feelings, Mr. Pollard, but I thought I ought to tell you how it really was with me that day.*

IF old man Pollard is still alive I hope he reads this because I want him to know I am not a thief and never have been. Instead of making up a lie, which I could have done, I told the truth, and got a licking. I don't care about the licking because I got a lot of them in grammar school. It was part of my education. Some of them I deserved, and some I didn't. The licking Mr. Pollard gave me I didn't deserve, and I hope he reads this because I am going to tell him why. I couldn't tell him that day because I didn't know how to explain what I knew. I am glad I haven't forgotten, though, because it is pretty important.

It was about spring pears.

The trees grew in a yard protected by a spike fence, but some of the branches grew beyond the fence. I was six, but a logician. A fence, I reasoned, can protect only that which it encloses.

Therefore, I said, the pears growing on the branches beyond the fence are mine—if I can reach them.

And I couldn't. Love of pears, though, encouraged effort.

<sup>1</sup> From *Inhale and Exhale* by William Saroyan. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc., New York.

I could see the pears, and I knew I wanted them. I did not want them only for eating, which would have been barbaric. I wanted them mostly for wanting them. I wanted pears, these being closest at the time and most desirable. More, though, I wanted wanting and getting, and I invented means.

It was during school recess, and the trees were two blocks from the school. I was thirsty for the sweet fluids of growing fruit, and for things less tangible. It is not stealing, I said.

It was adventure. Also art. Also religion, this sort of theft being a form of adoration. And it was exploration.

I told the Hebrew boy, Isaacs, I was going to the trees, and he said it was stealing. This meant nothing, or it meant that he was afraid to go with me. I did not bother at the time to investigate what it meant, and went running out of the school grounds, down the street. Peralta, I think it was. In minutes I did not know how long recess endured, but I knew it never endured long. Certainly never long *enough*. Recess should endure forever, was my opinion.

Running to pears as a boy of six is any number of classically beautiful things: music and poetry and maybe war. I reached the trees breathless but alert and smiling. The pears were fat and ready for eating, and for plucking from limbs. They were ready. The sun was warm. The moment was a moment of numerous clarities, air, body, and mind.

Among the leaves I saw the pears, fat and yellow and red, full of it, the stuff of life, from the sun, and I wanted. It was a thing they could not speak about in the second grade because they hadn't found words for it. They spoke only of the easiest things, but pears were basic and not easy to speak of except as pears. If they spoke of pears at all, they would speak of them only as pears, so much a dozen, not as shapes of living substance, miraculously; strange, exciting,

and marvelous. They would think of them apart from the trees and apart from the earth and apart from the sun, which was stupid.

They were mine if I could reach them, but I couldn't. It was lovely enough only to see them, but I had been looking at them for weeks. I had seen the trees when they had been bare of leaf. I had seen the coming of leaves, the coming of blossoms. I had seen the blossoms falling away before the pressure of the hard green shapes of unripe pears.

Now the pears were ripe and ready, and I was ready. I had seen and the pears were mine, from God.

But it was not to eat. It was to touch and feel and know: *the pear*. Of life—the sum of it—which could decay. It was to know and to make immortal.

A thief can be both an artist and a philosopher, and probably should be both. I do not know whether I invented the philosophy to justify the theft, or whether I denied the existence of theft in order to invent the philosophy. I know I was deeply sincere about wanting the ripe pears, and I know I was determined to get them, and to remain innocent.

Afterwards, when they made a thief of me, I weakened and almost believed I *was* a thief, but it was not so.

I laughed, standing beneath the pear boughs, but it was not the laughter of one who destroys and wastes. It was the laughter of one who creates and preserves. An artist is one who looks and sees, and all who have vision are not unblind. I saw the pears. I saw them first with my eyes, and little by little I saw them with every part of my body, and with all of my heart. Therefore, they were mine.

Also, because they existed on branches growing beyond the fence.

A tragic misfortune of youth is that it is speechless when it has most to say, and a sadness of maturity is that it is

garrulous when it has forgotten where to begin and what language to use. Oh, we have been well educated in error, all right. We at least know that we have forgotten.

I couldn't reach them, so I tried leaping, which was and is splendid. At first I leaped with the idea of reaching a branch and lowering it to myself, but after I had leaped two or three times I began to leap because it was splendid to leap.

It was like pears being more than pears. It was to get a little way off the earth, upward, inwardly and outwardly, and then to return suddenly to it, with a sound; to be flesh and more than flesh; full of it. And I leaped many times.

I was leaping when I heard the school bell ring, and I remembered that at first it sickened me because I knew I was late. A moment afterwards, though, I thought nothing of being late, having as justification both the ripe pears and my discovery of leaping.

I knew it was a reasonable bargain. I forgot what they were teaching that day in the second grade, but I believe it was hardly more important than my wanting and getting ripe pears, and finding out about leaping upwards towards pear boughs.

Wholly speechless, though. I didn't stop to think they would ask me, and I would not have the words to say it. I only knew I knew.

I got five pears by using a dead tree twig. There were many more to have, but I chose only five, those that were most ready. One I ate, laughing. Four I took to class, arriving ten minutes late.

A normal man is no less naïve at six than at sixty, but few men are normal. Many are seemingly civilized. Four pears I took to class, showing them as the reason for lateness. I do not remember what I said, if I said anything, but the ripe pears I showed.

This caused an instantaneous misunderstanding, and I knew I was being taken for a thief, which was both embarrassing and annoying. I had nothing to say because I had the pears. They were both the evidence and the justification, and I felt bewildered because the pears to Miss Larkin were only the evidence. I had hoped she would have more sense, being a teacher and one who had lived long.

She was severe and said many things. I understood only that she was angry and inclined towards the opinion that I should be punished. The details are blurred, but I remember sitting in the school office, feeling somewhat a thief, waiting for Mr. Pollard, our principal.

The pears were on his table, now certainly only evidence. They were cheerless and I was frightened.

There was nothing else to do; so I ate a pear. It was sweet, sweeter than the one I had eaten by the tree. The core remained in my hand, lingering there in a foolish way. I could not invent an artful thing to do with the core and began fearfully to think: apple core—who for?—Baltimore. And so on. A core should be for throwing, but there were walls around me and windows.

I ate also the core, having only in my hand a number of seeds. These I pocketed, thinking of growing pear trees of my own.

One pear followed another because I was frightened and disliked feeling a thief. It was an unaesthetic experience because I felt no joy.

Mr. Pollard came at last. His coming was like the coming of doom, and when he coughed I thought the whole world shook. He coughed a number of times, and then said: "I hear you have been stealing pears. Where are they?"

I imagined he wanted to eat a pear, and consequently felt very much ashamed of myself because I had none to give him, but I suppose he took it the other way around and

believed I was ashamed because I was a thief who had been caught.

Then I knew I would be punished, because I could see him taking advantage of my shame.

It was not pleasant, either, to hear him say that I had stolen, because I hadn't. I saw the pears before they were pears. I saw the bare tree twigs. I saw the leaves and the blossoms, and I kept seeing the pears until they were ready. I *made* them. The ripe ones belonged to me.

I said: "I ate them."

It is a pity I could not tell him I hadn't stolen the pears because I had created them, but I knew how to say only that which others expected me to say.

"You ate the pears?" he said. It seemed to me that he was angry.

Nevertheless, I said: "Yes, sir."

"How many pears?" he said.

"Four," I said.

"You *stole* four pears," he said, "and then *ate* them?"

"No, sir," I said. "Five. One I ate by the tree."

Everything was tangled up, and I knew I wouldn't be able to get out of it. I couldn't think of a thing to say that was my own, and all I could do was answer questions in a way that would justify his punishing me, which he did.

He gave me a sound licking with a leather strap, on the behind, and I cried for all I was worth. It didn't hurt so much as my crying made out that it hurt, but I *had* to cry because it seemed very strange to me that no one could even faintly understand why I picked the five pears and carried four of them to class when I could have eaten them instead and made up a lie about helping a stranger find a street, or something like that.

I know Miss Larkin is dead, but if old man Pollard is still alive I hope he reads this story because I am writing it

for him, saying now that I did *not* steal the pears, I created them, and took four to class because they were beautiful and I wanted others to see them as I saw them. No hard feelings, Mr. Pollard, but I thought I ought to tell you how it really was with me that day.



## THE DISINHERITED <sup>1</sup>

BY JO PAGANO

*Twenty dollars a week. By the time they paid the grocery bill and the taxes and the interest on the mortgage and bought clothes and carfare there wouldn't be much left over. I thought of the year before I went away, that year when I had not been able to find more than a few weeks work. I can't sponge on them, I thought. . . .*

### I

It was pretty dark by the time I got to the jungle, a mile or so outside of town. Walking along the tracks, I could see the flare of the fire rising above the edge of the gully, and I could hear the mutter of men's voices. I stepped to the edge of the gully and looked down. Heads and eyes turned up to me. There were perhaps a dozen men around the fire, including a couple of kids not over fifteen years old. I felt the quick, sharp appraisal of scrutinizing eyes as I made my way down to them. A five-gallon oil can was set on an oven of rocks over the fire, and I could smell the pungent odor of cooking stew. Bent over the can was a big red-headed man with a scar running down his right cheek. I went up to him and held out the spuds and the one onion I had lifted off the Jap's wagon back in town.

<sup>1</sup> From *Editor's Choice*, edited by Alfred Dashiell (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1934). Reprinted by permission of the author.



"Have you got enough spuds?" I said, with a mild attempt at jocularity.

He looked at the spuds and then at me.

"Put 'em in," he said.

I pulled out my pocket-knife and peeled the spuds and the onion, then cut them up and threw them into the can. Then I sat down on the ground with my back against a big rock. The smell of the stew made my stomach jump, I hadn't eaten since morning.

Pretty soon it was ready and we all crowded around. The two kids hung in the background. They had white, hungry faces beneath their grime, and I felt sorry for them. We heaped the stew on whatever we had to hold it with, tin cans, cups—some of the old-timers had army plates that they put away very carefully in their bundles after the meal—and sat down to eat. The stew had a sour taste but I wolfed it down. What did I care how it tasted? This time tomorrow I would be home.

After we had eaten—I could have eaten more, but there was nothing more to eat—we washed out the big can and cached it back of some rocks. I rolled a cigarette and leaned back against the rock and looked the other men over. They did not differ essentially from a thousand men I had looked at in jungles and on freights and in flop-houses during the past year. All men who are on the bum have a certain general similarity, regardless of their individual differences. They have all a lean, sullen look about them, and this lean sullenness stamps them like a label. In this group I was looking at now there were, besides the two kids and the scar-faced man, a gaunt old fellow with gray hair and the face of a grocer, a skinny, pimply-faced youth with a couple of teeth missing out of the front of his mouth, two or three Mexicans, a big buck nigger with his chin all broken out in sores, and a hatchet-faced man whom I immediately recognized to be

what is known, among men on the bum, as a wolf. A wolf is a man who picks up young boys on the road, for various reasons it is not necessary to go into here. There are hundreds of wolves on the road, and there are thousands of boys who fall prey to them. I mention these things because I want to give a true picture of that group around the fire. It would be easy to make them sound colorful and picturesque. The truth of it is, there was nothing colorful or picturesque or poetic about them. They were just a gang of hungry and filthy men banded together like the remnants of some bedraggled, defeated army; and in their faces you could read the story of malnutrition and desperation, of viciousness and hardship and disease.

I turned my face from them and, lying on my back, folded my hands beneath my head and looked at the stars. And I thought of home. For a year I had been on the bum and now I was sick of it, and I was going home. In that year I had gone a long, long way from home—oh, not so much in actual distance, though I had covered plenty of miles at that. But home is a place that means something clean and decent and sweet, and I had gone a long way from those things in the year I had been away. And now I was going back. For months I had ached to return home, and I had fought against the desire, but now I could not hold out any longer. I lay there and looked at the stars and thought of home, and I said to myself: "What's the use? What's the use of going back there?" But something inside of me refused to listen to all the reasons why I could not go back. I kept saying to myself: "I am going home," and I saw my mother and sister before me, and a warm happy feeling poured through me.

A whistle floated out over the tracks.

"There she is."

We all got up except those who were heading north. The

two kids, the big buck nigger, the wolf, and a couple of others stayed. As we went up the side of the gully I glanced back and saw the kids looking up at us, their faces red in the firelight. One of them waved. I waved back and ran down the tracks toward the water-tank, raising my coat-collar against the wind.

## II

As luck would have it, we found an open box car and piled inside. I curled up in a corner and went to sleep almost immediately. I woke up with the dawn slipping in through the crack in the door. The men were sprawled out all over the car, and I could smell the close, sour smell of their bodies, and I could hear snores and wheezes from chapped, open lips. I went to the door and looked outside. We were coming down through Glendale. Morning hung like a mist over houses, and once I saw a milk-wagon turning the corner of a street. It seemed strange to see these houses and streets and the milk-wagon, to know that life still went on in houses, that people still slept in beds and had fresh milk delivered to their doors.

The sun was well up by the time we pulled into Los Angeles, and you could hear roosters crowing and you could see people moving about in yards and houses. The freight was pulling in slowly and I dropped off it as we were going beneath a bridge in the north end of town. Up above the bridge was a park, wet and green beneath the sun, and at the base of a road that wound up through the park was a red and white service station. I went into the toilet and washed my hands and face good and clean and then shaved. After I had shaved I felt a lot better, and shivers of excitement were darting through me as I started for home.

But when I turned into our street my legs got suddenly weak and I ducked back of a tree and rolled a cigarette.

There was still time to turn back. I could see the lawn and the front of the house and my heart started pounding. At last I threw the cigarette down and started for the house, walking quickly so that I would get there before I lost my nerve. The front door was open but the screen was latched. I rang the bell. In a couple of seconds footsteps came down the hall. It was my sister, Louise.

"Bill!" she cried, fumbling at the latch and throwing the door open.

"Hello, sis," I said, trying to act calm.

"Bill!" she repeated, her voice catching; then suddenly she threw her arms about me. My throat choked up and I blinked my eyes to hold back the tears.

"Where's mother?"

"In the kitchen. Mamma, mamma!"

"Yes, dear; what is it?"

"It's Bill, mamma. Bill's come home!"

"Bill? Bill?"

She came running out into the hall wiping her hands on her apron, her hair bouncing over her ears.

"Oh, my boy, my darling boy!" she moaned, throwing her arms about me and holding me close. She was crying and Louise was sniffing and I felt hot tears flooding my own eyes.

"Where have you been? Why didn't you write? Have you been sick?"

"No, I'm all right," I said, wiping my eyes on my sleeve. "Please don't cry, mom. What's the use of me coming home if you're going to act like that?"

"Oh, You look so thin. Are you hungry?"

"No," I lied. "But I'm a little tired," I added. "Have you got any coffee?"

We went into the kitchen. My mother had got a lot older in the year I had been away. Her hair was almost completely

gray, now, and her forehead was full of wrinkles. And there was something else, too, a kind of uncertainty about her that I had never seen before. Suddenly I realized that my mother had become an old woman, and there was something strange and unfamiliar about her.

And not only she had changed. The house itself seemed different. The furniture was the same, and the rooms were the same rooms I used to know, but yet some indefinable change had taken place in the house, and I could not understand exactly what it was, but it was like something that is dying. The furniture was getting old now—the kitchen table was badly scratched and the tile on the sink had a big crack running through its side; the window curtains looked a little shabby, and the plaster on the wall above the stove was peeling badly. My mother had on an old dress, and her apron looked as if it had been washed and rewashed until the very grain in the cloth was visible. And even Louise looked old and worn. She is only twenty-two, but she looked at least twenty-six or seven. She was considerably thinner than she used to be and her hair was not kept as pretty as she used to keep it. Louise had always been proud of her hair, I remembered; but now it was done up with a couple of pins in the back and the short hairs on her neck looked unkempt. She had no make-up on and her face looked dry and sallow, and her lips chapped. And her eyes were nervous and uncertain too: she kept looking away from me, as though ashamed that I should see her like this, and at the same time there was something defensive in her attitude, as if she were saying: "Well, I can't help it, can I?"

My mother sat beside me at the table while Louise heated the coffee, and all the time I felt this strange thing that was like death in the house. It was a horrible sensation and I kept trying to fight it off. I kept trying to feel happy that I was home, that I was seeing my mother and sister again,

but I did not feel happy. I could hardly look at my mother. I looked everywhere but at her and I felt so awkward and self-conscious that I wanted to get up and run out. But I sat there at the table and tried to whip up some response. I tried again and again to feel "I'm home."

"How's dad?" I asked my mother.

"He's—all right."

"Is he still working for McClelland?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's good. It's better than nothing."

I had some bread and butter with the coffee and then went upstairs to take a bath. I wanted to get out of their sight as quickly as possible, but my mother came upstairs with me. In my room she pulled open a drawer of the dresser and I saw my shirts, all washed and ironed. I glanced at her standing there beside the dresser looking up at me with that dazed, fumbling look in her eyes, and a sick feeling went over me. I wanted to say something—anything, to break this horrible strangeness I felt toward her; but I could not think of anything to say. I put my arm around her shoulder.

"Thanks, mom."

"Your suit is hanging in the closet," she said. "I fixed the lining, so it's all right to wear. If there's anything else you want, just call. I'll be waiting downstairs."

She kissed me—a little uncertainly, as if she were not quite sure whether I would welcome the caress—and went out.

The hot-water knob in the bathtub was broken off at one side and I wondered if things were so bad they couldn't even afford to buy a water-knob. Things couldn't be that bad. But still, the old man wasn't making much, and he owed everybody in town, and there was a mortgage on the house. I looked at the broken knob and felt ashamed of myself. I ought to be home helping. That's what other people would

say about me, and that was what, standing looking at the knob, I said about myself; but out of twelve months before I left home I had worked exactly six weeks. I hadn't brought in enough to pay for my own board, let alone help the folks out. It was almost impossible to find work. And what little work I did find was all temporary; a day here, a day there. If I remember right, I made about forty dollars in something like eight months. I had looked everywhere for work, and I would have done anything. It is hard, I know, for those who have not confronted such a situation to realize that it can be possible for a man to want work and still not be able to find it. I have heard people say: "If these men really wanted work they could find it." On the bum I have gone to houses and asked to work for a meal and people have looked at me as if I were a criminal because I didn't have a job. Jesus Christ, they must think we like to live like stinking hungry rats.

It looked funny to see myself in regular clothes again. The suit looked as if it didn't belong on me. My neck stuck up skinnily out of the shirt collar, and my hands seemed twice as big as they ought to be, and my knuckles looked like walnuts. Sun and wind had burned my face to a dark, rough brown, and my hair was bleached almost yellow in spots and the skin along the edge of my ears was rough and red. In my overalls these things weren't so noticeable, but in this regular suit and white shirt I looked like a monkey in store clothes. I started to laugh, but suddenly I did not feel like laughing.

I turned and was about to start out of the room when I noticed my books, stuck in the bookcase beside the bed. The moment I saw them Janice bubbled to my mind, as if she had been waiting to be remembered. I stood stock-still and looked at the books. I wanted to go over and take out my old "Piersol's Anatomy" and run through it, but forced

myself not to. There was no use, I thought, in rubbing it in. I looked at the books for a moment longer, then closed the door softly and went downstairs. There was one thing more I had to do, now that I was home.

### III

It took me about a half-hour to get out to the U. I borrowed a quarter from my mother and rode there on the street car. It was too far to walk. An empty feeling went through me as I approached the campus. It all looked the same, bright and green beneath the sun. They were kicking a football around on the athletic field. I watched them for a minute or two. It was like watching something from a long way off. I wondered what kids in school thought about now. How could they take the playing of games seriously? How could they take their studies seriously? Sitting in their rooms poring over textbooks—how could they confine eyes to the pages? Printed words, printed little dead words telling of dead things: Greece and Rome and the Italy of the Renaissance. George Washington and the British; Lincoln and the Civil War. Dates and names; words and words; and all the time a paralyzed world gasping for breath outside the door. Could they not feel this world, those kids poring over their books inside the classrooms? I wondered what they thought of the future. I wondered what they thought when they read in newspapers of the millions of unemployed, of farmers threatening to defend their homes with shotguns against foreclosures, of the miners' children barefoot in the snow; of the breadlines in the great cities, and the disease and helplessness afflicting millions. What did they think about, reading the dead words in their books?

I stood watching them kicking the football beneath the sun, then turned and started across the campus. The build-



ings seemed abnormally quiet. It was as though I had been expecting some kind of movement, of vibration in the air, and instead I felt the lack of movement; there was an emptiness that I cannot exactly describe, but it was there nevertheless; it was in the great stone buildings, in the windows, in the grass and benches and trees. I went down a shady walk and came out facing the Arts and Science building. Where I stood was a big elm tree and the tree cut off some of my view of the building but I could see the wide stone steps leading up to the entrance. Something choking closed about my heart. It was on those steps that I had seen Janice for the first time. That was a long time ago that Janice stood on those steps with me looking up at her but right now it seemed as if it might have been only yesterday.

It seemed a million years since I had been a student here, but some of the things that happened to me were like yesterday. I thought of old classmates, of my profs, of the study rooms; I thought of crisp afternoons in the fall, and football rallies, and the whistle of the referee floating up over the stands at the opening of a big game. And I thought of other things. I thought of Janice with her blue eyes, coming in a yellow sweater to meet me; I thought of afternoons walking her home from school, the big front porch of her house, and her kid brother Tommy with his fox-terrier and his bicycle with the taped handle-bars. And all the time it was like remembering something from a long, long way off, something out of another life, a life that was dead.

What was I looking for? I stared at the buildings and there was something I wanted out of them, but I could not get it. I didn't know what it was I wanted the buildings to give me, but I longed to feel as if I had come back to something that meant something to me, something that had reality and familiarity, something that would *recognize* me; but it was not there. The buildings were just a group of

old stone buildings standing on a green campus with a lot of trees around it, and I was a stranger wandering about looking.

It was late in the afternoon when I got back to the house. I felt weak and tired, all drained out, and my temples were throbbing so hard I could barely see. As soon as I got in the house I said hello to my mother and went right on up to my room. I could not stand being with her. It was a horrible feeling to look at my mother and see that tired face, the tired wavering eyes. I lay down on the bed and tried to go to sleep but I could not sleep. If I could only get to sleep I could forget for a while. You can't think when you're sleeping. I lay there and said to myself: "Sleep, sleep." I said it over and over again but the word got mixed up with other words and I thought of all kinds of crazy things. I thought of that Mexican whose legs got sheared off when he fell beneath the train that hot morning going into San Diego. I saw him as plainly as if he were right in front of me, with his hands sticking up in the air like pitchforks and the sickening scream he let out. I jumped involuntarily when I thought of him and something icy trickled through my stomach and I turned over on my side. "Sleep, sleep," I said to myself. And then I thought of Janice. All of a sudden—like that—I thought of her, and something calm and sweet flowed through me. I tried to fill myself with the thought of her. I tried to fill my head and my body and the room with her. I tried to close out everything but the memory of her, but even while I tried something else in me was saying: "What's the use?"

And suddenly I could not stand it any more. "God damn it, God damn it!" I yelled, beating the pillow: and then I stopped short, surprised at the sound of my voice. I looked

at the pillow stupidly, and then I got up off the bed and went to the window. Outside children were playing on the street. The sun was going down and the sky was filled with a red glow. Shadows were spreading along the sidewalk. I stood and watched the shadows and the playing children. Janice had loved children. She had always talked about the children we would have when we got married. She had always talked about the children we would have when I finished school and had my degree in medicine and had got started. I looked at the shadows and thought of the children Janice and I would have had if my dad's business had not failed and I had been able to finish school. Looking out the window at the playing children my thoughts kept reaching back into this other world, and something inside of me was squirming and squirming. Suddenly I wanted to run. I turned abruptly from the window and started across the room, but when I got to the door I paused. Where was I going? I stared at the knob, then turned and went slowly back to the bed. "Jesus Christ," I thought, burying my head in the pillow. "Oh, Jesus, Jesus Christ!"

## IV

I must have dozed off a little because when I heard the door slamming downstairs it startled me wide-awake. The old man was home. In a few moments I heard voices, and then silence. They were telling him now, I thought. I saw my father with his big shoulders and cold eyes, not saying much but looking and listening, and my stomach twitched nervously. I dreaded the thought of facing him. He is not an easy man to face, with those cold eyes that look straight at you and his bluff, belligerent manner. I rolled a cigarette and sucked at it, trying to get up nerve enough to go down-

stairs. The door opened. I turned my head and saw Louise, come to call me to dinner.

"Papa's home," she said, looking at me, then at the floor self-consciously.

"I know—I heard him come in."

"Dinner's about ready. Mamma said to come down if you're ready."

She looked up at me from beneath her lashes and I thought I saw her lips quiver a little, but I could not be sure. I wanted to put my arms around her, to tell her how pretty she looked, but the words stuck in my throat. She stood looking at me like that from beneath her lashes for a moment; then went out of the room.

After a few moments I got up and went downstairs. My mother came out of the kitchen. She too had changed her dress and powdered her face a little, but her eyes looked red and swollen.

"Your father's home," she said.

"I know. Louise told me."

"He's in there," nodding toward the living room.

I turned from her and went in. The sooner this was over the better, I thought. He was seated in his deep chair beside the floor lamp with his back turned partly toward me. The evening paper was lifted up in front of his face but I could tell he was not reading. I saw his huge shoulders, and his big hands on the paper, and I felt smaller and smaller as I went toward him.

"Hello, dad."

The paper rustled and then his body shifted and he turned around. And what I saw was this: I saw an old man with sunken, furtive eyes.

"Hello, son," he said, half-rising wearily and putting his hand out. I shook his hand with my eyes on the floor and sat down on a chair opposite him. And what I felt in those

few seconds I cannot put down. There are no words to express the numb, choking feeling it gave me to see what had become of my father.

"Well, how is everything, dad?" I said. I had to say something.

"So-so," he said. "Just so-so."

"Well, it'll pick up," I said. "It's bound to pick up."

"Yes," he said, looking at me out of those wavering eyes. "It's bound to pick up"; but in his voice was neither hope nor conviction.

My mother came to the door and called us to dinner, and we rose and followed her into the dining room. My father's tread was slow and heavy.

My mother had fried a chicken and as she set it on the table my father looked at it and then at her, but she avoided his glance. And she had fried some sweet potatoes, too, and baked some summer squash. They were all my favorite dishes and she had prepared them all for me, but I found it difficult to eat. I thought of other meals I had eaten, the meals I had eaten on the bum, the watery soup and stale bread in relief agencies, the hand-out, the stews in jungles: I thought of the jails I had slept in, and the flop-houses, of fast and slow freights, and the army of wandering men and boys running like homeless ghosts across the face of America.

"What's the matter, dear? Don't you like the chicken?"

"What? Oh; oh, sure, it's great."

v

After the meal was over and the last dish had been washed and dried I asked Louise to come out with me on the porch. Now the darkness had completely fallen and lights bloomed in houses and the air was filled with

the indescribable, nostalgic scent of the summer night.

"Sit down," I said. "I want to ask you something."

She sat down on the old wicker porch-seat with its sagging back and looked up at me.

"I want you to tell me the truth," I said. "Just how bad are things?"

"Pretty bad," she said, and a kind of grim look came into her dark eyes.

"I gathered that," I said. "But just how bad? Aren't you working?"

"Working! I haven't worked a month since you left. They're hiring stenographers for ten dollars a week, and even then you can't find a job."

"What about the old man? Is he making enough for you all to get by?"

"He gets twenty dollars a week. Mr. McClelland had to cut him last month. He said he just couldn't help it, business is so bad. But he told papa not to worry; he said he'll always have a job with him, if it's only night watchman. He's been wonderful to us—I don't know what we would have done if it hadn't been for him."

"Yeah, I know," I said. "But suppose something should happen to the old man; what would mother do? Have they been able to save anything?"

"I don't think so, but there's his insurance. I heard them talking about it the other night. Papa said thank God his insurance is all paid for."

"Christ!" I said. "Do they talk about that?"

"Yes. Oh, Bill!" she said suddenly. "You have no idea how terrible it is to feel a burden on them. Sometimes I think I'll go crazy if I don't find a job. I've thought of leaving like you did, but where could I go? I'm not a man like you."

"I know," I said. "I know how you feel. Tell me, has

mamma been crying? I mean, this afternoon? Her eyes looked red when I came downstairs."

She did not answer at once, and then she nodded.

"What about?"

"You," she said, looking at me. "She's so worried about you. She says she doesn't know what's going to become of you."

"Hasn't she got enough to worry about without worrying about me?"

"Well, you know how she is," she said.

"Yeah, I know how she is." I sucked at my cigarette and looked off down the street. A few yards away a dog was sniffing at something in the gutter. I watched him for a moment, when suddenly I heard a bird call. Once, twice; and a whole submerged world of sensations whirled into being. I thought of fields in the night, of the fields of strawberries in Oregon beneath the stars. It was a fleeting recollection and it vanished as swiftly as it had come.

"Do you think I'll be able to find a job?" I asked.

"I don't know where. It's worse than before you left. That's one of the things mamma was crying about this afternoon, she's so worried. There just isn't any work. Both the Jarvis boys have been out of work for months, and they go out every morning looking. I don't know what's going to become of people if something doesn't happen pretty soon."

"They'll get drunk on beer," I said.

"What?"

"Nothing." I took another drag of the cigarette, then looked at her. "It's pretty tough on you, isn't it, kid?"

"Me? Oh! I'm all right. Only I feel so helpless."

"Yeah," I said. "I know."

I finished my cigarette and we went inside. I went up to my room and took off my shoes and lay down in the dark and tried to keep from thinking. After a while I heard the

sounds of the family going to bed. Presently the sounds ceased, and a profound silence fell over the house. I rolled a cigarette and lay in the dark smoking. Twenty dollars a week, I thought. By the time they paid the grocery bill and the taxes and the interest on the mortgage and bought clothes and carfare there would not be much left over. I thought of the year before I went away, that year when I had not been able to find more than a few weeks' work. If things were even that bad now, let alone worse like Louise had said, it might be months before I could find anything to do. A sick, tangled feeling went through me. "I can't sponge on them," I thought. "Jesus, they're having it tough enough as it is." And suddenly, I thought of Louise when she had come into my room to call me to dinner: I saw her standing before me in her worn dress looking shamefacedly at the floor.

I lay for a moment longer on the bed, watching the way the cigarette smoke curled upward; then I put the cigarette out and got up and went in my bare feet to the window. I held the curtain aside and looked out at the street, cold and grey beneath the street-lamp. The houses all around seemed dead as graves. Somewhere a man was coughing, a dry, rasping cough. That was the only sound. I stood looking out at the street for a few moments, then let the curtain fall and turned back into the room and pulled on my shoes.

At the corner I turned and looked back, but an intervening tree cut off my view of the house. I lifted my coat collar and went on down the street.





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